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ABSTRACT

This publication is intended for parents, teachers, and anyone in the wider community who has an interest in language, language acquisition, and second language learning; bilingual and multilingual education; bilingualism; language, culture, and society; language and power; and literacy. Extensive long-term research was conducted on a number of the complex issues related to language and bilingual education. This book shows how children who study through two languages can achieve higher levels of proficiency in these languages than if they had only studied the languages as academic subjects. With these advantages, and the potential spin-off that bilingual education can have on children's general educational progress and intellectual development, it is becoming a more popular option for parents and children in Australia. A very extensive glossary and suggestions for further reading is included. (Contains 25 references.) (Author/KFT)

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What's bilingual education all about?

A GUIDE TO LANGUAGE LEARNING IN TODAY'S SCHOOLS

ED 439 613

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Dr Heather Lotherington

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LANGUAGE AUSTRALIA

THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES AND LITERACY INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA

What's bilingual education all about?

A guide to language learning in today's schools

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For Maya, my little language learner
who has taught me so much

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foreword

I am delighted to provide this foreword for this extremely useful and interesting publication intended for parents, teachers and anyone in the wider community who has an interest in language, language acquisition, second language learning, bilingual and multilingual education, bilingualism, language/culture/society, language and power, and literacy among other fascinating topics.

Dr Lotherington has conducted extensive long-term research on a number of the complex issues related to language and bilingual education, and their connection with society. This publication confirms the notion that seriously based bilingual education is a very productive methodology for the teaching and learning of languages. You could not read this book and fail to be enthused about the remarkable diversity of forms of language, and the communication practices that humans have evolved to give shape to their unique experiences.

Dr Heather Lotherington has produced a highly readable and informative contribution to public understanding about these topics.

Language and literacy are often debated in the public media. In recent years in Australia there has been considerable concern expressed about the achievement of literacy standards in English. Unfortunately there is sometimes misunderstanding about what bilingual education is and what bilingual education is not, and about the relation between bilingualism and English, and specifically English literacy. Parents understandably want to be reassured that the research shows that learning in and through two languages is beneficial for their children's education.

This book shows how children who study through two languages can gain higher levels of proficiency in these languages than if the languages are merely taught as subjects. With these advantages, and the potential spin off that bilingual education can have on children's general educational progress and intellectual development, it is not surprising that more and more parents

are requesting that their children be enrolled in bilingual education programs every year.

The value of Dr Lotherington's book, and her lively and enthusiastic style, extends well beyond explaining the theory and practice of bilingual education. In accessible and interesting language, and with hundreds of well chosen examples, the book provides a rich and fascinating panorama of the vast field of language learning processes, bilingualism and bilingual education, literacy and writing.

This book comes at an important time when parents, teachers and interested individuals want to see Australia protect its positive multilingual and multicultural policies. Dr Lotherington's book convinces the reader not only that this is important but shows us how to do it. I am sure you will enjoy reading this, learning from it and sharing it with others.

Prof. Joseph Lo Bianco, AM
Chief Executive, Language Australia
National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia

preface

This book is written especially for parents and family members of children who are participating, or considering participating in a bilingual education program. The book grew out of a series of articles written for parents of children attending the partial immersion bilingual program at Camberwell Primary School in Melbourne and published in the Camberwell Primary School Newsletter in 1997 and 1998.

My involvement with bilingual education in Australia was both professional and personal as my daughter attended Camberwell Primary School. Coming from Canada, where immersion education was first developed, I was highly impressed with where Australians had taken immersion models of bilingual education. I found, though, that many members of the school community had unasked questions about the brave new world of second language learning that our children were experiencing. This book attempts to respond to those questions and to put bilingual education into context. It is also written with other members of the community in mind: those who are interested in the teaching and learning of languages in contemporary Australian society, such as teachers, language consultants, and students of education, languages and applied linguistics.

About 15% of children attending school in Australia speak a language other than English at home. In Sydney and Melbourne, that figure is over 25%. Provisions are made for children who haven't acquired English prior to attending school to learn English as a second language at school and they become bilingual through this fortuitous combination of speaking one language at home and another at school.

However, more Australian children speak English at home or in the community. Now they, too, are being given the opportunity to learn and use another language at school. Contemporary ways of teaching languages other than English (LOTEs) are providing our children with a much more effective second language learning experience than most of us endured when we were at school.

Bilingual education is not at all new in Australia. However, language policy has zig-zagged this century. People reading this book are likely to have been educated prior to Australia's multiculturalism policy, which ushered in a new approach to community languages and new opportunities for language learning.

Bilingual education may be a bit intimidating to those who are unused to the idea of using more than one language in day-to-day life, although there are more people in the world who are bi- or multilingual than monolingual. It is my hope that this introduction to bilingual education will answer the sorts of questions you might have about bilingual education. I also hope to inspire an appreciation of the wonder of language acquisition and a sense of the respect we should have for what we can do with the language/s we and our children use and are learning.

acknowledgments

My first thank you is to Ms Christine Moore, Principal of Camberwell Primary School, for being so receptive to my offer of writing a series of short articles on second language learning for the school newsletter, and for encouraging me to think about publishing the collected articles. I also wish to thank the parents of children attending Camberwell Primary School for reading and commenting on the articles. Your positive comments kept me going!

I wish to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my colleague and mentor at Monash University: Professor Michael Clyne, whose various critical readings of the manuscript helped me to focus my writing. I would also like to thank several members of the academic community for their critical assistance in reading drafts of the manuscript: Professor Ellen Cray of Carleton University, Dr Andrea Vechter of York University, and Ms Marie-Therese Jensen of Monash University. Your comments helped me to write a better book.

I would like to send a special thank you to Professor Joe LoBianco and to my publisher, Dave Tout, of Language Australia for their interest in and encouragement of the book and for their supportive assistance in the preparation of the manuscript.

Finally, a thank you to my daughter, Maya, whose trials and tribulations in French immersion education in Australia and Canada have helped me to see bilingual education from the inside out.

1 learning a second language

You may have studied a second language at some time in your life. For many parents, this will be a "foreign" language. Some parents who were either born overseas or brought up in one of the many households in Australia where the language of the home was a language other than English may have learned English as a second language (ESL) in school.

Many of us don't learn to speak our second language, if we are bilingual, or second languages, if we are multilingual, as well as our first. (We refer to any language learned after the first as a ***second language***, even if it is the third or fourth you have learned.) I often hear adults say that they can't actually put a sentence together in a foreign language they studied at school despite several years of formal instruction. Indeed some parents may have gradually swapped their home language for English as they progressed in school to the point where they have problems speaking the language they learned in the home as a child. Given that we are adults who are living organised, responsible lives, working and raising families, we can't be said to be particularly lacking in intelligence or industry. So why is learning – and using – a second language more difficult?

There is strong evidence that we are born ready to develop language with a bit of help from our caretakers who surround us with the particular language we will be using out of the thousands of languages spoken around the world today. Child language acquisition is part of normal human development, and although some people might be a shade more articulate than the rest of us (Booker prize winning novelists, for instance), we all have language – at least one. What's more, we learned to control this complex system very effectively, if perhaps not terribly elegantly, by the time we were five years old. So why is learning a second language more difficult?

First of all, learning a "second" language isn't particularly difficult if you learn it at the same time as the "first" language. Of course, then you have to ask which is the first language and which, the second... In this situation, in fact, both languages are learned as a "first" language. However, for this sort of

simultaneous bilingual language acquisition you need two different languages spoken to you by competent speakers of each language (ideally one language per person). Children whose parents speak different native languages and who each use their "own" language with their children create an ideal climate for simultaneous bilingual language acquisition. However, "one parent, one language" families are not in the majority and we cannot easily create this advantageous home language situation. In any case, we are all past being preschoolers as are most of our schoolchildren. So what is different about learning a second language after we have learned our first?

Firstly, we can't spend our entire waking day listening to and watching others use language as babies can. We have other things to do, like making breakfast, working, picking up the dry-cleaning, etc. Our kids have other things to do, too, like cleaning up their rooms (all motivational hints welcome), learning things at school, playing and making messes. None of us can dedicate the same amount of time to language learning that babies and toddlers can.

Secondly, we have developed past the mental stage of a baby (different success rates here, of course). People expect us to be able to learn and to perform. That goes for kids, too. We don't have people speaking to us in the language we are trying to learn all day long and being terribly congratulatory when we come out with a barely comprehensible word, as big people are likely to do with toddlers. No one is delighted that we are "speaking" as we already know one language. Think back to the days when you studied a foreign language in school, probably a European language such as French or German. Did the teacher react to your badly pronounced, ungrammatical answers with great tenderness and humour? My guess is no. So the bigger we get, the less tolerance tends to be shown towards our language learning efforts, most of which entail lots of inaccuracies and fumbles.

Thirdly, as we mature and gain a sense of self (by the age of 80, I think), we become increasingly self-conscious. We begin to listen to ourselves. We monitor and fret about our attempts to speak a second language. People are different in how inhibited they are but none of us can hold a candle to the lack of inhibition proudly displayed by a two year old child acquiring language. (Think of all the things your kids have loudly proclaimed in public that you died a thousand deaths for.) But without this sort of experimentation how do we learn when to say what?

Then, there is the little matter of practice. How often have you been able to

try out your two lessons of Japanese? Furthermore, what can you say with just a few lessons behind you? "Here is a pencil!" – whether said in English or Turkish – is not a good conversation starter.

At this stage we might back up a bit and ask: " What is language"? What is this ***thing*** that our children are learning at school?

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2 what is language?

While listening to a children's television program the other day, I heard an excellent summary of the wonder of human language, "Fish can breathe underwater but we can't; we can make words, but fish can't."

Language is a characteristic of human beings. Elephants have trunks; snakes have poisonous fangs (well, the really nasty ones do); kangaroos have pouches (handy!); bats have built-in sonar systems; humans have language: a sophisticated system of communication.

Only human beings have language. This trait defines us as a species. Ah, but I can talk to my pet, you might say. Yes, we talk to our dogs and cats, but they do not talk back to us in the same language. Aside from making animal noises that we all feel we can interpret perfectly, animals cannot actually tailor the sounds they make to consistently refer to particular meanings. There are many different barks, yelps, howls, meows and chirps, and we may well think that we know exactly what is signified by each ("Not that dry cat food again!" or "If I don't get to go out for my walk right now, I'll make a mess on the carpet!"). However, the noises made by animals are direct signs of what the animal is feeling, such as hunger, anger or fear. These sounds are not symbolic in the way that words are. There is not a particular, consistently recognisable ***meow*** for food and another distinct and recognisable ***woof*** for water. Animals communicate, many using elaborate systems tailored to their species, but they do not "speak a language".

We make animal noises, too (yes, all of us): grunts, snorts, coughs and burps, for example. However, in a conversation we know to interpret a word and to ignore a cough in the midst of a sentence. We can communicate reasonably well with assorted noises and gestures that are not, strictly speaking, language – as we have all done on that trip to Inner Mongolia, having unfortunately forgotten to learn how to say, "How much is that hand-woven carpet?" in Mongolian. Indeed, babies effectively communicate with a range of sounds that have not yet become language, including some pretty effective cries. Indeed, all parents wish their babies had language so they could be more

precise about their problems – hunger? colic? wet bottom? The various cries of baby's emotional distress are mighty useful at this stage of life, but they are not yet human language.

All humans have language (except for very seriously mentally or socially damaged people), but we don't all use the same language. Just as there are thousands of varieties of flowers, and trees, and animals, there are thousands of varieties of language. In order to be able to communicate with another human, we have to understand the same language. Everyone reading these words understands the shared conventions of English, even if we speak slightly different varieties or ***dialects*** of English, such as Australian, New Zealand, Indian, etc. We need to learn the shared conventions of Spanish or Korean or Croatian or Pitjantjatjara in order to use those varieties of human language. If we are not already speakers of the language, we have to learn it as a second language.

We might think about how we learned to speak in the first place.

How do children acquire this marvellous thing called language?

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3 how did we learn to speak our first language?

We aren't born talking. There are stories of babies born with a tooth and pictures of newborn babies with great mops of hair. However, despite the fact that language is a uniquely human trait, we are not born speaking.

Of course, babies do come into the world with their sound effects working! They are certainly capable of good lusty cries! However, it takes a year or so before a baby is ready to produce a single, recognisable, meaningful word. Nonetheless, babies are learning all about language during this first year of life as they watch and listen to language in use around them. We talk to our babies as we feed and clothe and change them; we play with them; we read them stories; we sing to them. And, of course, we continue to engage in our usual daily communication around them – talking with family members and friends, listening to the radio and television, holding telephone conversations, etc. Babies watch us with intent interest and respond in many exciting ways that will become part of their overall communication system. They are immersed in language.

During the first year of life, babies try out their noise-making apparatus and experiment with sounds. They make the sounds they hear as well as others they don't hear. In fact, babies are capable of making all the sounds that exist in human speech. They begin to ***coo*** or make vowel sounds at around two months ("ah-oh-ee-eye", etc) and by about six months of age, they have moved on to little vowel plus consonant combinations ("abaa-baa-baa-baa-mee-mee-mee-mee", etc.), known as ***babbling***. As babies listen to the language or languages spoken in the home, they zero in on the sounds and rhythms that recur and discard the sounds that are not reinforced in daily communication.

Around the age of 12 months, babies realise that some combinations of sounds work better than others do. These, of course, are words, and a child's first single words start to appear at this time. Many parents believe that their child has said "mama" or "dada" (depends on which parent is selectively hearing) much earlier on during their first year of life before first words are

normally spoken, but these utterances typically aren't connected to meaning. The single word utterances that children make as they move into their second year of life – which incidentally might sound like 2 or more words except that they always come stuck together, such as "allgone" or "wannago" – increase in number. Then at about a year and a half a magical thing happens and children realise that they can put 2 or more words together. This is the beginning of grammar and it's a slippery slope into full speech after that, especially when children get a grip on very powerful words such as "no" and "and". By about five years of age, children are fully conversational but, of course, they are still not very experienced in life so they don't understand the same things about the world as older children do and, hence, can't articulate what they don't yet understand.

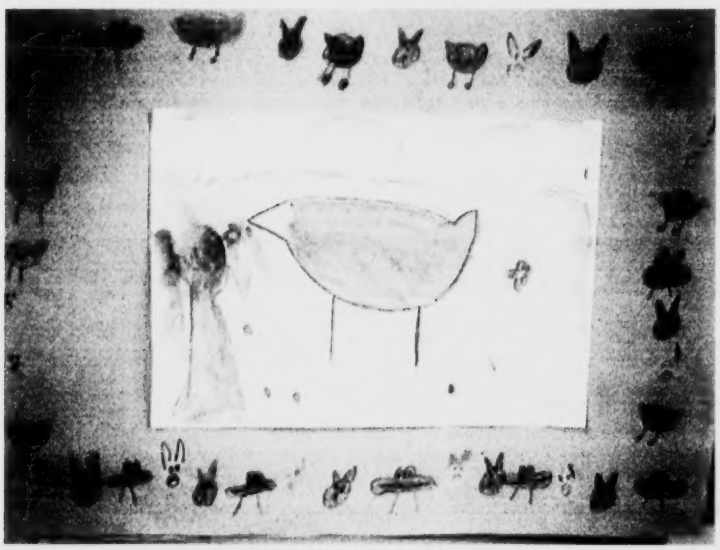
Kids differ as to how quickly or slowly they improve their pronunciation during these preschool years and come out with hilarious "sentences" as they slowly work out how the structure of the language – or grammar – works. Once they reach school, they are ready for another very important human development: literacy. However, literacy development is separate from language development. As a species we don't seem to have evolved yet into automatic readers in the same way that we have become automatic speakers. We'll talk more about literacy later.

We become quite ecstatic when our babies begin to develop language, which all normal children everywhere do following the same human timetable of development irrespective of the particular language they are acquiring. Children seem to follow a common route over the first five years of life, whether they are learning English or Latvian or Laotian, which leads to their becoming fully communicative, if maybe not terribly sophisticated, little talkers. This common path seems to require both normal human cognitive development (nature) – the child's own brainpower – and conversational stimulation (nurture) – your daily conversations with your child.

Everyday conversations with children contribute importantly to child language development. We talk to babies in special ways, including ***baby talk*** – which, despite being occasionally socially maligned, has been shown in research to be helpful in child language acquisition. Also, it looks as though adults around the world typically have special ways of talking to their children, although the types of simplifications made and conversational guidance given are not always parallel across cultures.

Furthermore, no one "teaches" a child to speak his or her native language, despite rather stretched claims made by some parents. Children appear to learn the rules of grammar in their first language by figuring them out for themselves. You can safely ignore the advice of the "helpful" uncle who tells you to explain sharemarket quotations to your 3 month old baby. Whether you read newspaper articles about national politics or stories about doggies in highly exaggerated tones, you're not going to "teach" your preschool child correct grammar before she is ready to figure it out for herself.

But we can teach grammar in second language learning. In fact, the learning of grammar is a facet of language learning that tends to work differently in second language learning than it does in the acquisition of our first language.



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4 how do we learn a second language?

I am watching with interest as my daughter's homework gets increasingly engaging. The texts she brings home to read in French are now real stories on scientific and historical topics. How, I think to myself, did she get to this point of reading a language that she uses only at school?

We need to think about how we learn a second language in order to answer this question.

We learn our first language naturally. (Hands up all people who do not speak any language...) As we've seen, language acquisition seems to have a biological timetable of its own which, given the normal social support for its development (families and friends blabbing away to the child and to each other) creates a fully conversational little person out of a baby in about five years.

Somehow, though, our language acquisition hardware doesn't seem to guarantee the same success the second time around. Once we are past our preschool years, our built-in language learning facility seems to go into semi-retirement. Mind you, we change in other ways, too. We develop mentally and physically so that we can control our world a little better as children than we did as babies and better still as adults than we did as children. We learn to think and to read and write. We find more to do in the day than we did as babies and so have less time to listen to language and to try out new sounds and new words. People are no longer so thrilled to listen to us either and where we once got oodles of attention as babies and preschoolers, we get increasingly less attention and tolerance as bigger people. We become aware of ourselves. We become aware of others. We get anxious about making mistakes.

All of this personal development changes the seemingly effortless language learning of our early childhood into a rather different endeavour once we hit school age. Age, of course, does affect second language learning in some ways, which we'll discuss later. Suffice it to say that children are not going to learn a second language purely through formal study any faster than adults

would, although children will likely sound more convincingly authentic.

Although it is apparent that learning a second language is not a repeat performance of learning a first language, there are interesting parallels in the learning stages we go through both times around. The differences are quite clear. Since our school-aged children can already talk, they don't have to go through a year of making strange gurgling sounds in learning their second language as they did when they learned to speak their first language. They can already make a whole assortment of sounds – all the ones they need to speak their home language, whether that is English or Lithuanian or Greek. Children also know much more about life and about how you do things in life with language, whether that is knowing how and when to say "thank-you" for the birthday gift, or knowing how to effectively insult a younger brother. Children and adults can activate this knowledge they have about how to use language to do things when learning to speak another language.

So what is similar? Firstly, children need some time to listen to a language just as they did as babies. It takes awhile to get the rhythm of a language and to start to differentiate the sounds. This ***silent period*** is parallel to a baby's first year of life when he or she gets to listen to everyone and try out a few sounds. Beginning second language learners need some of that trial practice, too. Then when they get a little more confident, they try a few words, which are likely to be single words or very short and probably memorised chunks of language, such as greetings: "Bonjour Madame" or politeness indicators: "muchas graçias, Señora" or leave-takings: "ciao". This stage has much in common with a baby's first words. As children become more familiar with how these words are put together so that they make sense – grammar, in other words – which they get from listening to fluent speakers (the teacher!), they start to try out little combinations of words which get increasingly more novel as confidence grows. This is similar to the early word-combining stage of child language acquisition. These attempts at connected speech will be full of "errors", which are normal at this stage of language development and should be seen as an attempt to build and shape a newly developing language. Just as we wouldn't dream of pointing out to a three year old child that she has the wrong tense in her "sentence", so we must have some tolerance and patience with early stage second language learners.

The final and very long stage of language development is for second language learners what it is for children acquiring their mother tongue: becoming

native-like in the sounds and uses of the language. This is a long stage of many years for all language learners, whether of first or second languages, but it is treated quite differently in second language learning situations where the language can actually be taught. Now, there can be focused language ***input*** with correction and points of grammar. There are also facts to be learned and tests to be passed. The stakes are raised!

Many second language learners, however, never refine their developing language to native speaker level. Here is the biggest difference between first and second language learners: there are no first language learners who stop short of full language development. However, most second language learners never quite reach the naturalness, grammaticality and social appropriateness of native speakers in their language use. Many second language learners, especially those not given the opportunity of formal language teaching, ***fossilise***, ending up with functional but ungrammatical language.

As thinking beings, primary school children are able to look at language more abstractly and apply rules and logic where as toddlers they obviously couldn't. This can be exploited in the classroom. Research shows that instruction in a second language assists second language learners in acquiring accuracy in their language use. This is a big difference in second language learning; a second language can be formally taught.

This brief introduction to the stages of second language acquisition is meant to put you at ease when your child doesn't want to read and translate the full menu in an Italian restaurant, despite learning Italian at school. Language learning takes time and a great deal of effort. It still does seem a little magical, though, when your Grade Five child reads to you about carbon dating … in French.

21

5 why learn a second language?

Why, we might ask, should we bother learning other languages?

The first response to this question is why should we bother learning mathematics or music, or anything at school? Ultimately, this is a very silly question. Given that we live in a world of numbers and print, and our social well-being depends on taking care of our bank balances and taxation notices as well as our bodies, subjects such as mathematics, English, physical education and health are easily applicable to everyday life. So, too is second language learning.

To monolingual people who are comfortable in their (limited) verbal socks, learning another language may seem like rather a frill. Wouldn't it be easier for all of us to speak the same language? Shouldn't we all just speak English?

For all of us to speak the same language all of the time – English would be the most obvious choice in Australia – about a quarter of the population of Melbourne would have to shift languages. On a worldwide basis, over two thirds of the world would have to learn English as a second language in order to join the estimated one to two billion of us who already speak it, a majority of whom are non-native speakers.

It must be noted, first and foremost, that there are other contenders for world languages that have large populations of speakers and substantial international influence, including Chinese, Spanish, Arabic, Russian and French. If we all learned to speak English only, we might miss out on the language that another billion people thought should be THE language to be spoken by everyone.

Language is attached very firmly to culture. In a world of one dominant superlanguage, would one culture be considered superior to all others? In this case, the only recourse to cultural imperialism would be to institute an artificial language, such as Esperanto, as world language. However, even an artificial language, i.e., one that is made up by someone, will diversify to meet the needs of the population speaking it. We would find the language growing social and cultural roots and branching off into dialects of speakers such that

the Esperanto used in China would eventually develop differences to the Esperanto spoken in Australia, just as the English spoken in Australia is a bit different from the English spoken in Scotland.

There is a strong argument for the maintenance of cultural and linguistic diversity. We would not draw straws for the one remaining animal or plant to be left on this earth. Why would we do the same for people? The enormous knowledge base that we as a species lay claim to is encoded in many different languages and cultures. Translation is a means of making that knowledge or art available to others who do not understand the language, but life is not always so easily or smoothly translated from one way of doing and being to another. Much of civilisation would be lost if languages were left to die.

Most people in the world will still need to learn a second language in order to speak English. These people will enjoy many social, economic and cognitive benefits of bilingualism, or knowing and being able to use two languages. Indeed, more people on earth are bi- or multilingual than monolingual. In other words, speaking just one language is not the norm; speaking more than one language is.

Social survival is, of course, possible with only one language. Social survival is possible, too, without functional literacy skills but the quality of life is certainly diminished. It is truly questionable whether there are any monocultural enclaves left on earth. We live in an increasingly shrinking world in which languages and cultures are not only accessible but confronting. Our children learn their social skills not just in the context of their school or metropolitan community or country, but very much more than we used to, in the village of earth. They (and we too!) need to deal simultaneously with encroaching globalisation and increasing multiculturalism. One of the many benefits of bilingualism is making people into better global citizens.

Communications links nowadays are mind-boggling. We are networked through a plethora of electronic media. Children can reach across the world at the press of a button or two on the television, the computer, the telephone or the fax. We are a part of a much larger electronic civilisation. At the same time, a lot of the world is moving much closer to home. Australia, like so many countries around the world nowadays, is multicultural in population as well as outlook; many Australian cities are fascinatingly so. For our children to grow into the world citizens they must become, learning about other cultural viewpoints is essential. An excellent way to learn about other cultures

is through learning other languages. Learning a second language encourages appreciation and understanding of other cultural ways of thinking and doing.

Access to other ways of knowing and being and doing through understanding the languages of other peoples benefits us individually by making a bigger world to live in; socially and culturally, through supporting multiple ways of thinking; and economically, by opening up the potential for new markets. These social, cultural and economic benefits of bilingualism are only part of the benefits package, however. There are individual cognitive benefits as well.

Some time ago I was having a little chat with the cleaner at the out-of-school-hours program at my daughter's school. We have regular conversations to keep my rather rusty Spanish in basic working order. On this occasion, a couple of children raced over to get something close to where we were talking. I watched them as they stopped dead in their tracks. They looked at us for a bit and then listened. Having sorted out that we were not speaking French, the language they were learning at school, they looked at each other quizzically and raced off again. Would a monolingual child have done this? Maybe yes but more likely, no. Children who know more than one language are far more aware of linguistic diversity. They are far more aware of language in general. We call this ability to handle language in a more objective way: ***metalinguistic awareness***. It is a trait that is associated with literacy development. As children learn to read and write, they understand how to use language as a tool. Bilingual children have high metalinguistic awareness. This is useful to their learning.

Children in bilingual programs are regularly reported to be doing as well as if not better than monolingual children in the same grades in tests of English, maths, etc. (usually by about grade 8). I won't tell you that your child or children will become Einstein through bilingual studies any more than I will tell you that listening to Mozart increases intelligence – whatever that is - although studies have asserted this. What I can say with confidence is that bilingualism increases mental flexibility and cultural understanding. Learning another language is literally mind-stretching.

6 Is there a best age to learn a second language?

I often hear people say that children learn language much more quickly than adults. This is a thorny question in second language acquisition research. Age is not quite as important as many people think. And the debate doesn't always go in the child's favour, either. The issues are rather tricky.

No one will dispute that, on balance, younger children acquire better pronunciation of a second language than older children or adults do so long as they start early enough – by early primary school, at the latest. However much needs to be said here. First of all, a good accent is not necessarily evidence of proficient language use. In fact, having a bit of a foreign accent is not such a bad thing. It alerts the listener to the fact that you are a second language learner, that you learned to speak another language as your first language (which, hopefully, you still maintain) and that your way of understanding things will extend beyond the borders of the language being spoken. Having an accent which is indistinguishable from the native speaker's means that you will be expected to conduct a conversation as well as be able to read and write like a native speaker. This is a tall order if your language development is less than native speaker level! For example, in Australia, migrant preschool children often pick up a conversational level of English with other kids at play although they speak a commmunity language at home. However, these children may not have a good enough command of English for literate applications at school and may be expected to do school work above their level of linguistic development because they seem to have such native-like speech.

Language is very complex, as we have seen. It is made up of sounds; words; structures, both small and large (phrases, sentences, stories, conversations); meaning, both within language (you don't normally say: ***My dog flies.*** or ***My aunt's beard needs trimming.***, for example) and relating language to situation (so ***She's beautiful!*** could describe a baby or a dog or a boat depending on what you're talking about and where). Language users need to be able to use language appropriately as called for by the social situation (although more than a few of us have never mastered the cocktail party circuit). We need to

be able to use it correctly (grammatical nuts and bolts) and fluently (back to the cocktail party tongue tie…). To be a good second language learner, you have to be able to work all these parts of language.

Which leads me back to age and second language learning. The older child tends to learn language faster. Well, the older child tends to learn everything faster than the younger child so why should language be different? However, the older we get, the more of a sense of self we acquire. This self-consciousness can inhibit us in trying to say things in a second language (no one wants to sound like an idiot – especially a teenager). So we find that children (and adults!) of different ages have both strengths and weaknesses in second language learning. Young children are better at hearing and producing new sounds but they are behind older children in learning power. Adults have more social finesse than teenagers which helps in the inevitable situations of embarrassment that second language learning routinely provides, but we haven't got as much time to spend thinking about language, or practising it. And then again there is the question of memory which, like it or not, starts to droop a bit with age.

Some theorists believe that human language learning is fundamentally affected in late childhood around the time of puberty. This notion of a ***critical period*** for language learning found support in studies of extraordinarily socially deprived "wolf children" who survived early childhood (somehow) without human social care. The few who have been studied did not encounter human conversation and didn't learn to speak with humans during the first five years of life when normal children seem to be programmed to learn to talk. Attempts to teach them to talk after early childhood did not meet with equal success. Scientists have argued that our brains go through subtle developmental changes that affect memory, for instance, and our acquisition of language. However, these studies are concerned with learning a first or native language, which is not identical to the process of learning a second language. If it were, we would all be able to learn an endless number of languages to native speaker level – or conversely, no one would be able to learn any other languages after the age of about 5. However, people have learned to speak other languages that they have encountered at various times in their lives from time immemorial.

So what we know is that you can learn a language at any age but you'll sound better if you start when you are young and you'll learn faster as you get a little older.

7 are some languages harder than others?

People commonly have opinions about languages and language learning that are not rooted in fact. It is just as important to understand how the varieties of human language relate to and compare with each other as it is to know how the human organism acquires language.

Well over two hundred LOTEs are spoken by Australians today. Are these languages harder or easier than English? Are they somehow more complex or bigger? How different are these languages from each other? How different are they from English?

Linguists – specialists in the study of language – believe that all languages are of equal complexity: No language in the world is considered to be more or less complex than any other. Languages differ though – in the writing systems they use, the particular rules governing how words are combined, the set of sounds they require, and how they map meanings onto words. For instance, a "house" in Australia is a little different from a "bure" in Fiji, or a "casa" in Mexico, although these words all refer to a home dwelling.

It is clear that languages sound different. Each language has a sound "fingerprint": Albanian and Hindi don't sound any more alike than do English and Swahili. Some languages, such as Cantonese and Thai, have meaningful "tones" that help to distinguish words; others, such as Xhosa (the native language of Nelson Mandela) incorporate rare clicking sounds.

Languages are observably different in other ways, too. Some languages, such as Khmer and Greek, use different alphabets. Some languages use writing systems that are not alphabetic, e.g., Chinese. This means that reading Chinese is quite different from reading English. English uses the Roman alphabet, but not in a very efficient way. Spanish and Polish (and many other languages) also use the Roman alphabet, each with some customisation, but all in all with a higher consistency in sound-to-letter correspondence. In this way, it is easier to decode Spanish or Polish than it is to decode English or French, which, for interesting historical reasons, use annoyingly unnecessary letters. This also means that it is a little harder to spell English or French than it is Spanish or

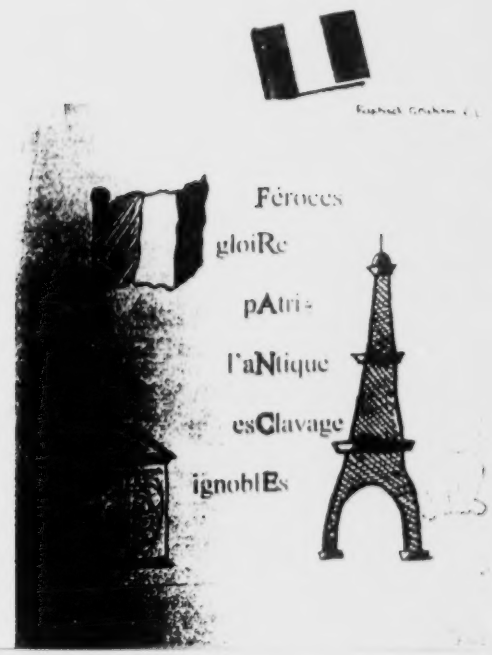
Polish. However, Polish uses a more inflected grammatical system than English. Spanish, like many other languages around the world, requires more refinement than English in how formally people are addressed. Chinese uses basically monosyllabic words as opposed to the incredibly long words that can be made in German, but Chinese is written in a very elaborate script. Polynesian languages, which have many fewer sounds than English (which has many fewer sounds than Hindi) use far more specialised pronouns, and so it goes. In case you're curious, English has an exceptionally large vocabulary (because it has soaked up lots of words from other languages spoken by friends and enemies alike) and a picky sense of expressing time which results in fussy ways of expressing past, present and future events. (Imagine learning the verb forms for, "She would have been writing for over an hour now."). However, English has a generally stripped down grammar and very simple pronouns. These examples indicate the parts of languages that might be easier or more difficult to learn for a speaker of another language.

Through swings and roundabouts, languages balance out. All languages have elements that are less or more complicated but not a single one is observably simpler overall than any other. But, you may say, learning French is easier for an English speaker than learning Japanese. And you would be correct. However, it is not the language system itself that is the difficulty – it is the ***distance*** between the languages and, implicitly, the cultures.

Most of the thousands of languages spoken around the globe are genetically linked in language families. Related languages share features in their systems, making them more like each other than they are like languages from other families. Learning closely related languages is easier than learning more distantly related languages because we have expectations of similar operating systems. Don't be fooled, though. All languages in Europe are not related any more than all languages in Asia are. Some strange language cousins are flung around the globe: Hindi is closer to English than it is to Tamil, for example. However, Danish is much more closely related to English than Hindi is. Finnish is not related to English at all. Nor is Basque, which, interestingly doesn't seem to be linked to any other language. Language distance is one factor contributing to "difficulty" in language learning.

Humans also vary in their potential to learn languages (and everything else). Some children will be more talented in learning to speak their LOTE through

school study than will others. Similarly, some children will do better at mathematics than others. However, none will be prevented from learning a second language through perceived lack of brain power. All people can learn to speak second languages. My experience in teaching and learning about language has taken me to corners of the globe where I have met people who have never attended school but who speak 4 or 5 languages fluently. No kidding. I guess our children should be able to squeeze in another one without too much effort!



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8 language families: a look at English

Language families reflect patterns of human civilisation. English, for example, is a Germanic language. Our linguistic ancestors way back when were a collection of northern European thugs – barbaric tribesmen who came from around Denmark, Holland and Germany. German is another Germanic language (you'd figured this out, hadn't you?) and Dutch, another. There are plenty more, with the closest blood relation to English probably being Frisian, a language spoken in parts of northern Holland.

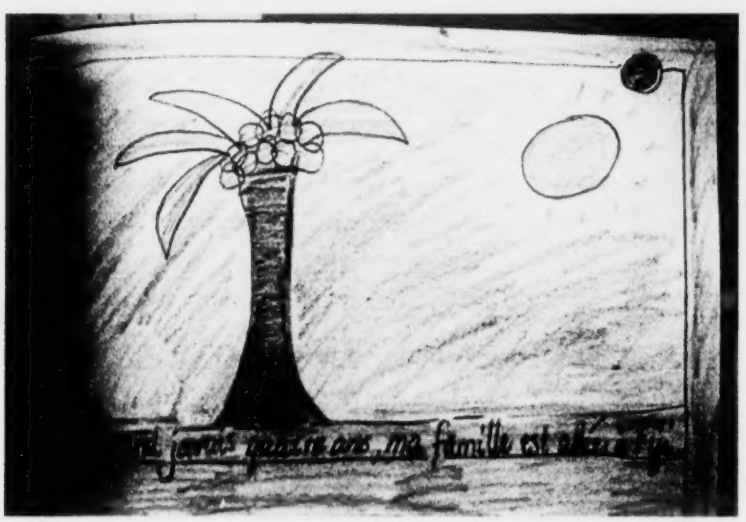
The first "English" people evolved culturally and linguistically from the Jutes, Saxons and Angles: a fairly brutal lot who invaded Celtic civilisations in an island in northern Europe which, after much bloodshed and pillaging, became known as the land of the Angles, originally, 'Englaland' (Angle-land). These early "English" people are credited with having the gift of the gab: a strong oral culture. Their language: Englisc, now better known as English, has survived many waves of other conquerors, including particularly, the Vikings (another Germanic gang) and a nearly 200 year stint under Norman French rule, although not without change!

The Norman Conquest was also linguistic; the Norman kings brought their language (which had, in turn, been acquired from their conquerors) to England and left the local vernacular to the peasants, where it survived for a couple of centuries, but changed quite dramatically through contact with the Norman French spoken by the elite. To this day, English has an enormous amount of French borrowing evident in its large vocabulary, particularly noticeable in the abundance of synonyms (words with pretty much the same meaning), such as: quick – rapid (rapide en français). English also uses French borrowings in its vocabulary of, for example, meat, where the English word is the animal and the French is the meat eaten from the animal: cow – beef (boeuf en français), pig – pork (porc en français); and the language of the law, reflecting past French sovereignty, in terms such as judgment (jugement) and evidence (evidence). Another example of French borrowing shows up against our vulgar vocabulary where virtually every "four-letter word" is English and the medical equivalent is from the French (don't worry – no examples given).

In these cases, the English word is rough and ready, the French, sophisticated. So the language of medieval English peasants has retained a certain social stigma to this day.

Borrowing is the chief relationship between English and French: an adoption of words from French into English through marriage of cultures, not through evolutionary bloodline. English and French are distantly related, however. They belong to the same overall family of languages: Indo-European, which includes many smaller subgroups of more obviously related languages from Europe through to India (though not every language spoken in that large area is Indo-European). The grammar and sound systems of related languages have developed from the same ancestral language (a very, very long time ago!) and so tend to have similarities that make learning each other a little more predictable. There are many Indo-European subgroups, including Germanic, where we find English, German, Dutch and the Scandinavian languages (but not Finnish!); Slavic, which includes, for instance, Russian, Polish, Czech and Serbian (but not Hungarian!); Romance, which includes French, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian among others; and more. So English and French are remote cousins – as are English and Greek, or Lithuanian and Hindi, for example.

Does this mean that French or German or Italian would be easier to learn for speakers of English than Hebrew or Indonesian or Thai? Relatively speaking, yes. English has more in common with French than it does with languages that are not in the Indo-European family. However, there are factors other than language distance, such as the literacy conventions used in writing the language, which also impact on how easy or difficult a language is to learn.



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9 related languages

I have picked a box of biscuits off the counter at the supermarket. It says: ***Choco Leibniz*** and although I don't know German, I am no fool: like preschool children who recognise their favourite junk food by the package long before grown-ups realise they are reading, I have sorted out what these are. Yummy chocolate-covered biscuits cannot be disguised by foreign languages.

At home, giving them a taste test, I look at the description. This is what I see:

Butterkeks mit Vollmilch-Schokolade

Butter biscuits set in real milk chocolate

Biscuits Petit Beurre et chocolat au lait

Biscotti secchi al burro e cioccolato al latte

Aha! I think. What an excellent example of related languages. We have already talked about the fact that English is a Germanic language and that French is a Romance language. It will take you all of about 10 seconds to work out which two of these descriptions are examples of Germanic languages and which two are Romance. (Hint! Your choices are German, Italian, French and English...) Now here's something a little trickier: what English word has been borrowed from French?

At this point, I realise two things: 1) I am testing you. Not terribly fair, is it? 2) I have eaten the better part of this box of biscuits. I feel a little guilty about the test part so I've put the answers at the bottom. I don't feel guilty about the biscuits at all – I'm going to eat the rest.

I figure that this is ok on both counts. You can now see why I said that learning a related language is somewhat easier because there are similarities in the structure of the language, or grammar, and the vocabulary as well. But how much variation can there be in one language before it actually becomes another language? Where does being a separate language start?

We call a highly related language a ***dialect***. For instance, I speak a slightly

different dialect of English because I did not grow up in Australia. When I talk, people then ask me where I am from. In fact, I have to watch it because I often say the wrong thing. I have to remember that an elevator is a lift and that gas is petrol and cookies are biscuits and tea is probably dinner but supper is not. I also endlessly confuse people on the telephone with names like Mark and Mike. I never quite know what the bits and pieces of my daughter's school uniform are because a windcheater is actually a sweatshirt and not a windbreaker and a jumper is a sweater and not a tunic, and I haven't the foggiest notion what a few of the other pieces of clothing are and am rather afraid to ask!

Australian English is an interesting variety of English. When we first arrived in Australia, I got a little yellow ticket in my "Welcome to Australia" booklet which said to call such and such a number if I didn't speak English. No problem, I thought. Several days of Australian English later I was seriously contemplating ringing the number. The differences are mostly in vocabulary and vowel sounds, yet the similarities are so overwhelming that we simply say that Australians and Canadians speak different dialects of the same language: English. Only when that mutual intelligibility starts to fray, and particularly where a political boundary goes up, do we tend to consider related languages to be separate languages rather than dialects.

So if you look again at the French and Italian descriptions of ***Choco Leibniz***, you should see lots of similarities. They started off as the same language thousands of years ago: Vulgar Latin. But that's another story.

Answer key:

Butterkeks mit Vollmilch-Schokolade	*Deutsch*	*(Germanic language)*
Butter biscuits set in real milk chocolate	*English*	*(Germanic language)*
Biscuits Petit Beurre et chocolat au lait	*Français*	*(Romance language)*
Biscotti secchi al burro e cioccolato al latte	*Italiano*	*(Romance language)*

biscuit was borrowed from French into middle English (a long time ago!)

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10 language families: a look at French

French is a Romance language. It is related to Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Romanian to name a few well-known languages in the Romance language family. It is quite easy to see how closely French is related to other Romance languages. For example, 'g'day' is 'bonjour' in French; 'buongiorno', in Italian. They sound pretty much alike, don't they? 'Love' is another good one: 'amour' in French; 'amor' in Spanish; and 'amore' in Italian. So you could probably fake your way through a few sweet nothings in a variety of Mediterranean situations on the basis of one of these 'Romance' languages (just kidding).

The Romance languages developed from the same source language: Vulgar Latin (lingua vulgaris in Latin), which was the type of language spoken everyday, not the kind found in books. French is one of the variants of modern day Vulgar Latin – the variety that developed from the language brought by the Roman Empire to the Gauls: the Celtic people who inhabited what is now France.

The Gauls spoke a Celtic language that is now dead. (Living Celtic languages include Welsh and Gaelic.) The spread of the Roman Empire into Gaul included a linguistic conversion. So complete was this shift to Vulgar Latin, that succeeding invaders could not conquer the language, although the name of what it eventually became: français, came in from a Germanic source: the Germanic Franks, and obviously stuck.

So French was, at one time, the regional form of Vulgar Latin. It's important to remember that mass education is a relatively recent phenomenon, really only going back a century or so. Very, very few people could actually read and write back in the days of the Roman Empire: only scribes and monks for the most part. So this was truly the language of the common people.

Modern day French developed from the variety of spoken lingua vulgaris used around Paris. This is sensible – if you have power, people listen to you. This was the variety of language with political clout. By the 17th century, French had become a very important language; in fact, it had ousted Latin as the language of diplomacy in Europe.

Nowadays, French, like English and Chinese is what we call a ***pluricentric*** language: it is used as a national language in many countries of the world and French-speaking people, or francophones, can be found in Canada, Senegal, Tahiti and Switzerland just to name a few of the many French-speaking territories around the globe.

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11 language and culture: how different languages talk about the world

How similar are languages? Is learning a second language a matter of learning the equivalent word or phrase in the LOTE and translating?

For several reasons, no. Not only can languages be dissimilar in the ways in which they encode thought structurally, but they also reflect different cultures – the customary ways of doing things of a group of people. These differences can be seen in different dialects of the same basic language, too. For instance, I am a native English speaker. However, I am Canadian. I have found myself stumbling in conversations in Australia where I wonder why I am supposed to bring a "plate" to an informal meeting (where surely if they needed dishes, they would ask me to bring more than just one small plate!), and why the plumber, who I have never met before and don't expect to see again, says on leaving, "see ya!". Of course, I soon figured out that the plate was supposed to have food on it, and that the plumber didn't expect to see me afterwards either. But these uses of language are a little different from how we would put the same message in Canada.

Another example: I once lived in England where I studied linguistics. I can remember the enormous frustration of standing in a pub in London, wanting to order a beer, seeing beer being drunk all around me, being poured out of hand-pumps and cans and bottles, and not knowing how to get one. An American friend sidled up to me and wisely counselled: "ask for 'a half of bitter, please' and they'll give you a little mug of beer". It worked. But amidst the requests for bitter, stout, lager, ale – pale and dark, and so forth in the bar, there was no mention of a simple ordinary beer.

The words used in a particular language, the vocabulary of a language, reflect what is of importance to its speakers. These concepts are not equal across languages. ***Beer*** is clearly a very delineated drink in England, so one needs to know various labels for the substance reflecting different ingredients, processing, storage, etc. This sort of difference in words, which is used to indicate shades of meaning, has the possibility of being even more emphatic

in markedly different cultures. ***Coconut***, for example, is just that in English, but in many Pacific languages, there are many, many different words to describe the stages of readiness of a growing coconut, and how the nut is being used.

Similarly, some concepts which we might hold to be pretty basic are, in fact, not. The colours of the rainbow can be seen and labelled in greater or fewer colour bands. Are ***green*** and ***blue*** seen as different colours or the same? Is orange a colour or just a shade of ***red***? Do all cultures have names for perceived colour tones such as ***puce***, ***magenta*** and ***burnt sienna***, or are these "seen" only in some cultures? In any case, such specialised colour words would normally be used by only some members of society, such as painters and fashion designers. ***Vermilion*** to manufacturers of cosmetics is probably just ***bright red*** to most of us.

Counting can be different, too. Not all cultures have a base 10 number system. Indeed, for any of us educated back in the dark ages, the concept of a ***dozen*** or a ***foot***, which is based on 12, is still there. However, we count in tens. Some cultures have counting systems on different number bases: there are cultures in Papua New Guinea which count on base 5, for example.

We engage in conversations differently as well. We speak more loudly or softly, with more or fewer or different gestures, within closer or further range of the person or people we are talking to, making intent eye contact or not looking into the face of the other at all (polite in some cultures), and so on. My family once watched an animated movie of Pinocchio where the character seemed to be all arms. Eventually we realised that the cartoon was dubbed; it had been created in Italy, where much larger arm gestures are used by speakers than are typically found in English-speaking cultures!

Similarly, we allot each other culturally different spaces and levels of physical contact as we speak. Count the times you touch someone while holding a two-way conversation in English. Now watch two people speaking another language (this might require tuning in to SBS...). Most English speakers are not very tactile. (Of course, this depends on how well you know the person you are speaking with and how formal or friendly the conversation is meant to be.) The French would typically be more tactile than English speakers in a similar conversational situation; the Russians, maybe even more so. The Japanese, on the other hand, would tend to maintain a clearer physical distance in conversation. These distances are seen in our cultural use of space

as well. In Indonesia, there is little space permitted for individuals on the street or in public transportation. In Australia, such encroachments on personal space would probably be interpreted as discourteous.

Cultures vary in who addresses whom and how, as well. Here, students normally call university lecturers by their first names. This familiarity would be seen as very improper in Japan where social status is much more highly marked in language use, or in Sri Lanka, where one of my graduate students informs me that a student might well kneel before a lecturer out of respect.

We learn language within a culture. Learning a second language entails learning about the culture of the people who speak that language in order to understand why things are expressed as they are. This means that we must not only learn to use the words and grammar of a second language, which will not be exactly parallel to our own language, but we must also learn to use the language according to its cultural and social norms. Language is much bigger than its grammar and vocabulary!

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12 what is vocabulary?

Ask people what you need to know to speak a second language and they are likely to say: grammar and vocabulary. Every language has a its own grammar and its own vocabulary. Let's start with vocabulary first – words.

Do you remember learning "vocabulary" at school? Long shopping lists of words that you had to memorise for Italian or German or Latin classes. Fortunately, language teaching methods have moved on from those medieval days. However, vocabulary is still one of the fundamentals of language. We know that we need to know which words to use before we can say something in another language (or in this one!). But what actually are words? What part do they play in learning and using a language?

Your first answer is probably that words are groups of letters with spaces around them. On paper, some words look like this, yes. Some don't: ***smdnkjgxruyq*** is a group of letters with spaces around it but it is not a word (well, certainly not in English) and because it has too many consonants together, making it very hard to pronounce, it is unlikely to be a word in any known language. Of course, some languages don't use letters. A Chinese word, for example, would be written as a ***logogram***, or character, rather than as a group of letters. So we couldn't describe words written in non-alphabetic scripts as groups of letters with spaces around them although they are words just the same.

We need to recognise words in speech where we don't have the benefit of seeing their written forms. Are there spaces around words when people talk? Just stop and listen to someone for a moment. Turn on the radio or television if there isn't anyone speaking in the background around you. What you will notice is that there are no spaces around words when people speak. Turn the volume down low so that it is just barely audible. You might not catch individual words now. But you will hear a stream of sound. To make this example more dramatic, tune into a foreign language station. (Try it!) Can you hear breaks between individual words? No.

At the same time, I'm willing to bet that there is not one person reading this

who cannot recognise a word. Indeed, we use thousands of words daily in our everyday lives – just look at the size of a dictionary! But there are problems: is textbook one word or two? What about ***grapevine*** or ***backpack***? Is ***footy*** a word? ***wellies***? ***ocker***? ***veg***? ***AC/DC***? ***yumcha***? According to the ***Australian Oxford Paperback Dictionary***, these are all current words in Australian English, as are others I would take issue with, such as ***zzz***...

What about ***Down's Syndrome***? Or ***swimming pool***? You can't have ***Down's*** without ***Syndrome***, and though there are different sorts of pools, a ***swimming pool*** is a single concept. Similarly, ***ice*** and ***cream*** are each words but ice cream is a concept on its own. So do we count ***ice cream*** as one word or two?

It gets worse: ***cream*** seems to be an easy enough word. Or is it? Look at these sentences:

1 ***I'll have the cream of pumpkin soup.***

2 ***Watch the big guy cream him in this next round.***

3 ***Have we got any cream for the strawberries?***

4 ***The bride wore a beautiful cream silk dress.***

5 ***Joan recommends lavender cold cream for makeup removal.***

6 ***It seems that most kids like chocolate ice cream.***

7 ***It's a good class - the absolute cream of the crop.***

8 ***Apply the cream sparingly to inflamed areas for three days.***

9 ***Cream butter and sugar well before adding eggs.***

10 ***Have you tried the new fat-reduced cream cheese?***

11 ***The AFL grand final winners will cream off the best of the new recruits.***

12 ***You must try my coconut cream pie!***

We now need to think about whether ***cream*** is one word or many. Sometimes we find that words have several meanings, usually related, such as ***cream*** as a milk fat substance in sentences 1,3,6, and 10; and ***cream*** as a substance with a particular consistency in sentences 5,8 and 12. Perhaps, we can relate ***cream*** as an action akin to the process of skimming cream from milk in sentences 7,11; and cream as representative of the colour of milk fat as in sentence 4. But what about sentences 2 and 9? Is this ***cream***, meaning to beat to a pulp, the same word as the other very flexible word related in some way to the fatty layer of milk? It's debatable.

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Vocabulary is a collection of words, which can be slippery little rascals. Words are not just little bunches of letters to be committed to memory with the hopes that they will re-emerge on cue when needed. They are units of meaning which are often quite complex. A single concept, such as ***ice cream*** or ***swimming pool*** uses composite parts that are words in their own right.

Also, you can't just use any old words together. Could you have a ***turquoise idea***? ***A fluffy car***? ***A gangrenous croissant***? Highly unlikely unless you are a poet (and probably not a very good one with these oddball combinations). Could you have an ***obese anorexic***? A ***pregnant uncle***? ***A violet orange***? Impossible. Furthermore, could you say, ***once in a blue … sun***? ***As fast as a speeding … torpedo***? ***It would make your … wig … stand on end***? Sorry. To use a word in a language, you have to know which words you can use it with. Furthermore, words are fussy: ***a beautiful woman*** sounds better than a ***handsome woman***, although both ***beautiful*** and ***handsome*** denote "good-looking" in this case. Now try the same adjectives with ***man***. This leads to another problem: can a man call another man ***beautiful***? (Yes, under certain circumstances.) You can have a ***beautiful*** car, but can you have a ***beautiful truck***? ***A beautiful lawn mower***? ***A beautiful garden hose***? Words are used in combination with other words, and they must be learned so that they can be combined appropriately to get the intended meaning across.

As if matching up the meaning, the shades of meaning and expected combinations of words wasn't hard enough, some parts of words, typically the syllables attached to the beginning or the ending of a word, can also give us information about grammatical function, such as: go***ing***, school***s***, jump***ed***. Without these end bits, we don't know the numbers involved or time when the action occurred or the duration of an action. And what about: ***unhappy***, ***redo***, ***abnormal***? What information do ***un***, ***re***, and ***ab*** add to the basic word?

In many languages these ***affixes*** appear on virtually every word. These languages are highly inflected; that means that they append a lot of grammatical information to words. The kinds of meaning that get stuck on in these little additions include such valuable information as who is speaking, who is being spoken to, the degree of formal respect shown to the addressee, when the action took place, where the action took place, who was the recipient of the action, and so on. In Spanish, for example, the first person singular pronoun ("I" in English) is "yo". But to say "I have", there is no need to say "yo tengo" as the suffix of "tengo" – go – indicates I as well as the

present tense. So to say "I have", one simply says "tengo". This is different from the system of indicating who is speaking in English, which requires inclusion of the subject of the action: "I" or "you" or "they", etc. However, it is similar to English in that the time of the action is shown in the endings of verbs, so that "I have" and "I had" have different shapes accordingly.

These differences in words from language to language have to be learned. Learners of second languages need to know about words that do or don't go together (thank you very much but not *thank you very many); and the ways words represent cultural meaning (What is the cultural translation of "Voilà!"?) as well as the grammatical information that has to go on words (she goes not *she go).

Many languages, such as Russian, Finnish, German, Japanese and Arabic (from various language families), are highly inflected. The Romance languages, such as French, Spanish and Italian – very popular second languages in Australia – are also inflected languages. Chinese and Indonesian (from different language families), on the other hand, are not inflected at all. English falls somewhere in the middle. Where a language inserts a lot of information on individual words, the order of these words in a sentence is not so important. Where there is not much information on words, they must be used in a particular order. We need to know how those words fit together before we can use them in any sensible way.

This is the beginning of grammar, the structure of language.

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13 what is grammar?

I'm terrible at grammar! I hate grammar! I'm never sure about my grammar!

Let's face it – grammar has a bad name. It's associated – even by well educated people – with a sort of arcane other-worldly knowledge about what is "right" according to some obscure source located in another century right next to cleanliness and godliness. People often have a sense that their grammar might reveal something unacceptable about their education – kind of like finding your verbal fly undone. See I've just done it – I've switched from 3rd person (people, which is ***they***) to 2nd person (***you***) within what should be looked at as one sentence. Except we don't actually talk in sentences.

We all bump into people who think they know everything and are forever "correcting" other people's grammar. People who do this are often quite wrong about contemporary language structure, aside from being in monstrously bad taste. What they are trying to enforce is ***prescriptive grammar***. Prescriptive grammar is about telling you what is "correct" according to a sort of grammatical etiquette. Prescriptive grammarians take their models of good speech and good writing from history: writers who are long dead, for instance. Writers thought to be models of how we all should speak and write a language, say English, were usually published in the days when few people were well educated and so they provided a beacon of good ways of using language to the great huddled uneducated masses. However, nowadays, all children go to school and differences in the ways we speak tend to show differences in our social or cultural backgrounds. How can this be wrong?

Grammar is structure. It is the scaffolding of language: the very backbone that holds words together. Grammar is to language what the skeleton is to the body. It holds all the bits in the right place. Just knowing words isn't enough. They have to be put into the right order.

These word orders are language specific. In other words, each language has its own grammar. For example, in English, we normally put adjectives in front of the nouns they describe or modify (are you still with me?), e.g., I have a

big, fat, black cat. (***big, fat,*** and ***black*** are all adjectives). In other languages, the grammatical convention may be different. For instance, in English, the adjective precedes the noun (the ***black*** cat), but in French, the adjective usually goes after the noun it modifies – le chat ***noir*** (*the cat ***black***).

If I were to simply graft English word order onto French words, I would come up with all but incomprehensible "French". Similarly, if I were to put my words in a funny order in English, then my sentence would also be ungrammatical. For instance, the same sentence:

funny in then be sentence would English ungrammatical my also were put words my I order a in to if similarly.

Now that's bad grammar! (In fact, that's nonexistent grammar.)

The idea that grammar is snobbish correctness is etiquette rather than grammaticality: a sort of Emily Post-type manual of what language to put on in high society in order to impress. Prescriptive grammar does not reflect how people actually do speak a language. Indeed, this sort of pedantic snobbism can also be quite wrong. Take for instance the poor word ***ain't*** which was a variant of the contracted negative form of "I am". The English grammatical convention or rule looks like this:

I am,	am I not,	***ain't I (or an't I)***
you are,	are you not,	***aren't you***
it is,	is it not,	***isn't it***

Apparently people confused ***an't*** I and ***aren't*** I through the pronunciation fashions of the time and, even worse, began to say, ain't it (heaven forbid – might cause a revolution!). So nineteenth century schoolteachers (apologies to my fellow teachers) admonished their students to avoid ain't and people used

I am,	am I not,	***aren't I***

which is just as bad as ***ain't it*** if you're going to be fussy. ***Aren't I*** is now normative; in other words, it is the usual way we say this even though it is an exceptional construction. And that is how ***ain't*** got a bad name.

Grammar is functional. So when your kids are studying a second language, worry that they are learning how to use the language according to its normal patterns and conventions. This is good grammar and, given differences between languages, learning it is a challenge!

14 why do we have an accent?

In chapter 3, we talked about how babies make lots of sounds in their first year of life – before they begin to talk. All of them, in fact. A child born to a monolingual English-speaking Australian couple will sort out those sounds needed for her dialect of English before she actually starts to talk. But in that first year, our babies make more sounds than all of us put together. They have to be able to do this. They might end up speaking a Khoisan 'click' language from Africa, in which clicking sounds are formed in conjunction with other sounds; or, perhaps an Asian tonal language, such as Chinese, Vietnamese or Thai, in which the same word shape takes on another meaning because it is pronounced with a higher or lower, rising or falling tone; or English with its relatively rare 'r' and 'th' sounds.

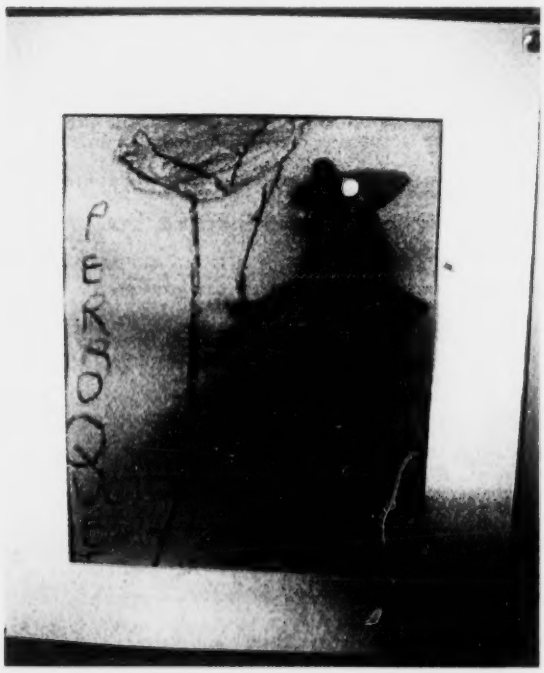
People who have learned English in adulthood usually have problems with these (and other) sounds in English and we often hear something rather different routinely substituted for 'r' and 'th'. Similarly, none of us who speak English as our native language – regardless of the particular dialect – make the sort of 'r' that is used in French, or that used in Spanish, or that used in German, just for example. So, guess what – we are pretty obvious when we try to say words with this new sound in a language we are learning. Just for fun, try to say in a French-sounding accent: ***merci*** (thank you). How authentic do you sound?

Babies try out new sounds with their tiny, developing muscles and their spanking new senses. Our vocal apparatus is quite used to the sounds we already make and it shows when we try to pronounce something innovative! So just as practice – constantly making the same set of sounds – makes perfect, it also tends to limit us to expecting to make those sounds. Furthermore, our ears get used to hearing a consistent range of sounds and when we encounter something different, we hear and make the closest recognisable sound found in our verbal repertoire. This goes not only for the new sounds we encounter in foreign languages but for dialects, too. We all laugh when someone can affect an accent (of English) so that they sound like someone from Texas or Yorkshire or Jamaica, etc. Many of us aren't terribly

good at mimicking, though. It is the skill of hearing and making slightly but audibly different sounds that produces a convincing accent – in any language.

So we tend to hear and produce the same set of sounds as we hear and produce daily in the variety of language that we speak. We become virtually perfect at those sounds. If new sounds are introduced when we are young children and better capable of distinguishing and making new sounds, then we will be able to produce those new sounds very well, too. Note the good accents our primary school-aged children have in their LOTEs. (This is dependent, of course, on the LOTE teacher modelling the accent of a native speaker.) But we who are older and greying about the edges have experienced vocal cords and ears that are no longer as sensitive to the new sounds young children are more easily able to discriminate and make. And that's why when those of us who are native English speakers speak another language that we have learned after our childhood years, we sound like an English-speaking person speaking French, Dutch, Hungarian, Indonesian, Bengali, Imbonggu, etc...

This is also one of the few advantages of age in the second language classroom. Children hear and pronounce new sounds better than adults do.



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15 what is bilingualism?

What does it mean to be bilingual? The easy answer to this question is that it means a person can speak two languages. Every normal person on the face of the earth speaks at least one language. However, for a number of interesting reasons, we don't all speak two or more languages.

To speak two languages – ok – but how well? Do our children qualify as bilinguals with a few years of a LOTE under their belts? Does bilingualism mean that a person can read in two languages, too? Does a bilingual have to be able to function in two different cultures as well?

To consider these questions, we have to think about what it means to know one language. As we discussed in chapter 2, only human beings have language. (In experiments, apes have learned to use human language reduced to a small number of symbols or gestures but they have not been able to use this limited system as creatively as a 3 year old human can with unlimited spoken language.) Not only is language species specific but it is universal across the species. Only humans with severely damaged brains or severely damaged socialisation (i.e., "wolf children", such as Tarzan of the apes) have impaired language functioning. There have been two known "wolf children" who have been extensively studied over the past two centuries, and their lack of normal language development has been carefully documented. Mind you, it's good to know that throwing newborn babies into a den of wolves is reasonably rare. (On the other hand, maybe the survival rate of such children is very low ...)

So what do we do with language? We talk to each other, to our pets, to ourselves on a bad day, to drivers in other cars who can't hear us and to television personalities on the box who can't see us. We talk to transmit information, to make business transactions, to socialise, to show love, to seek justice, to offer opinions, to search our souls, to pass the time of day... We have even devised methods of transmitting language through symbolic systems by using writing, one of the greatest of human achievements, and signing, an ingenious alternative channel used principally by people who do not have hearing.

We function within a culture that shapes and is shaped by language. When we say what we say is conditioned by our cultural upbringing. For example, in English, a typical greeting includes "How are you?" and the expected reply is along the lines of "fine" and does not contain a prolonged account of an aching sacroiliac, even if you feel utterly abysmal. Similarly, a common greeting in Chinese would be an inquiry as to whether you have eaten, to which the polite reply is "yes", even if you're famished. In Fiji, an everyday greeting would be an inquiry as to where you are going and the expected response is something vague about just down the road. However, "Where are you going?" would be interpreted as a request for a lift in Australia, just as "Have you eaten lunch yet?" would precede an invitation to do so. So the vehicle of language is tailored to cultural expectations.

Language is sensitive to social life, too. Can you honestly say that you would issue exactly the same invitation for, say, a Sunday afternoon lunch, to your neighbour, your boss, a favourite media personality, the Prime Minister? Knowing a language means knowing how to say things appropriately. Whereas you might shout "Sit down!" to your child who has run away from her homework three times already, you would be more likely to say something a little more hospitable to a neighbour who has knocked on your door with something fresh out of the oven.

If we can do all of this miraculous communicating in our native language, do we need to do it all in a second language to be bilingual? This is tricky territory.

It is rare to find a person who speaks two languages equally well. Bilinguals tend to have a dominant language. They also tend to use one language in certain places (e.g., English in school) and the other, elsewhere (e.g., Latvian at home) as called for by the social situation. Such bilinguals tend to be more comfortable with different language functions in each language. In other words, they may have two rather different sets of specialised vocabulary – one for business in language A and another for recreation in language B, although they will certainly have a common base vocabulary in both languages. You may hear people say something like: "I prefer to use English at work as I'm not used to talking about my work in Dutch/ Korean/ Tamil/ Portuguese, etc.".

But do we consider ourselves to be bilingual if we know that we can't communicate perfectly in our second language but we can communicate to

some degree? It is in this murky area that most people find themselves. My guess is that you will not call yourself an English-German bilingual on the basis of two years of studying German undertaken in 1966-7 and not followed up. However, what do you say when you can function very basically in a language, albeit with so-so grammar and even more so-so pronunciation? Let's give that some thought.

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16 when is a person bilingual?

What does it mean to know a language? When do you know enough Japanese or Italian or Arabic to be able to say that you speak it? (This doesn't count if you grew up speaking that language at home!) When can you call yourself "bilingual"?

Think about how you pick out that a person (who is old enough to be able to talk) doesn't speak a language very well. Probably you hear an "accent" that is neither local nor belonging to other dialects of English. Part of that perceived accent may be a different sort of rhythm to the language. This rhythm may even be quite jerky and pained if the person is very unsure and looking for words. You might also hear odd grammar – bits left off the end of words, words turned around in a sentence, left out and so on, e.g., "*Why you do that? *She go to town. *I not sure." It's worth pointing out that this will be different from what you consider to be "bad" grammar in another English speaker who uses stigmatised forms, such as "We could have went there. He don't know. Youse guys", etc. You might even decide that the vocabulary of your non-native speaker is a little sparse and maybe even off-target here and there, with odd statements like: "*I love to eat fungus." (meaning mushrooms), or "*Are you wearing a clock?" (meaning watch). A wonderful goof that I once heard was a fellow skier, a speaker of French, waxing her cross-country skis. In French, the verb to wax (skis) is "farter". "Let's go!" I called to her. "Wait a minute," she yelled back: "I have to fart my skis."

Measuring language proficiency is difficult. We need to consider pronunciation, fluency, grammar and vocabulary. Let's think about pronunciation first. A good friend of mine lives in France where she speaks fluent French but with a strong English accent. She is clearly not a native speaker of French. But she is bilingual.

Conversely, you may know someone who has a terrific accent in another language but can't actually say much. This is, I think, a far more serious problem. Knowing a language means being able to function in it. If an accent does not impede communication, then it is a relatively cosmetic feature of

language production. Of course, if a person's accent is so terrible that no one can understand him or her, this is a major problem. However, if accent only provides social information as to the origins of the speaker, then this is no different from what accents tell us about native speakers.

Fluency is a dead giveaway. When a speaker searches madly for words, hems and haws (probably using non-native pause fillers, instead of the usual ***hmmm, ubbh...***) and generally gropes to find enough words to put together, then puts them together badly, you know you are dealing with a beginner. Bilingualism is some way down the track yet.

Now what about grammar? A speaker who has off-beat grammatical accuracy gives a further indication of his or her knowledge of and proficiency in the second language. It is very possible for a person to become reasonably fluent, i.e., able to speak without frequently stopping to search for words, but at the same time, to manifest poor grammar. Usually this indicates that the individual lacked sufficient formal study of the language. He or she might not speak "well" but, if fluent, may still be considered to be functionally bilingual.

Lastly, vocabulary. A poor vocabulary is unlikely to stick out as badly as an unintelligible accent, halting fluency, and hotchpotch grammar. These things will hit you first. Interestingly, it is often "good" vocabulary (a large vocabulary range and precise, even poetic word choice) that distinguishes the outstanding speaker of a language. ("Big words", my daughter would say.)

Bilingualism is about functionality. If you can communicate effectively and in a range of situations in a second language, you can consider yourself to be bilingual. There are degrees. Clearly, some people are "more" bilingual than others. True balanced bilinguals (who have equal command over two languages) are rare.

We can always understand more of a language than we can produce. This goes across the board – toddlers can understand much more than they can express; second language learners can understand more of a second language than they can produce in either speaking or writing; native speakers can understand long-winded speeches they couldn't deliver and read great books they couldn't write. A passive understanding of a second language is developed through immersion in that language where the listener or reader is not called upon to reply in equal measure. This sort of situation can include formal education, visiting a country or staying with people who use that

language amongst themselves. As such, it is possible for a learner to have a much greater passive knowledge of a second language than is obvious in his or her active use. To some extent we should expect this lop-sided development in our children at school. They are listening to far more language than they are called upon to produce or reproduce in class. Teachers always talk far more than their students. So children's passive knowledge of the LOTE will consequently be greater than their active production of that language.

Bilingualism is a slow, continuous process. Don't be fooled that a child's good accent necessarily indicates proficiency in the language. A good accent is more likely to indicate the child's ability to mimic (a "good ear"), a positive attitude towards the language, and a relatively young age at which second language learning began. Similarly, poor grammar may indicate that a person has acquired just enough functional, everyday language to make do and didn't have the opportunity or the motivation for further education. This person may still be fluent.

Children enrolled in bilingual education programs are learning to communicate in a LOTE for specific purposes during a designated part of the day. Will this turn them into full balanced bilinguals? No. But it will teach them much more about language in general and the LOTE in particular than any other school program currently on offer in Australia. And this, as we have seen, is a good thing for social, cultural and cognitive development.

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17 what is "bilingual education"?

Children in a bilingual education program are learning and using two languages at school. However, I'm willing to lay healthy odds that lots of you have studied languages other than your mother tongue at school and not come out anywhere close to being bilingual. So what does "bilingual education" actually mean?

First of all, the old days of studying grammar and having that called learning French or German or Italian are not quite over. This sort of language teaching still occurs although teachers nowadays are much better informed and prepared to teach second languages as functioning systems than they were in earlier generations.

But studying a second language as a subject at school, like mathematics or science, is not what bilingual education is all about. Bilingual education means learning through the medium of two languages. This is not learning ***about*** language structure; it is learning ***through*** language use. Both languages have their own place as classroom medium; each language is used to learn particular subjects.

There are many types of bilingual programs, the best known being ***immersion,*** in which the LOTE is taught implicitly through its use as the medium of communication in the classroom, rather than explicitly as a subject. ***Immersion*** can be ***total*** (100% of content taught through the LOTE) or ***partial*** (50% of content taught through the LOTE). Immersion programs can be ***early*** – entered at the beginning of primary school, ***middle*** – entered a few years into primary school, or ***late*** – entered at the beginning of secondary school. There are other types of ***content-based bilingual programs***, in which a subject or two is taught through the medium of the LOTE. Lastly, there are ***language object programs***, where the language is focused on as a subject rather than simply used as a medium of communication. The choice of program rests largely on curriculum aims and community support.

The form of bilingual education typically used in schools in Victoria is called ***partial immersion***. In this type of ***content-based program***, the second

language is used as the classroom medium for a proportion of teaching time, usually about 50% of the day. What typically happens is that half of the subjects to be studied are taught in the LOTE and the other half, in English. For example, at Bayswater South Primary School in Melbourne, German is used for a significant percentage of weekly classroom instruction. At Camberwell Primary School, also in Melbourne, about 50% of the classroom teaching is conducted in French. Teaching in these LOTES is subject specific, i.e., maths and art might be taught in the LOTE and science and physical education, in English. Immersion education begins when children start school.

The theory behind immersion education is communicative competence: we will learn a language if given the opportunity to function in it, concentrating on getting the meaning across rather than focusing on learning the formal characteristics of the language. Traditional language teaching concentrates on correct form (Remember all those verb declensions in Latin...). Learning lists of verb forms and irregular plurals does not prepare the learner to actually use the language, as many of us can attest to. Immersion education provides plenty of opportunity to hear the LOTE. Learners concentrate on function: using the language to do things, rather than form: learning the rules of grammar. Of course, form must be learned, too or we can't actually function. In immersion education, language form is learned gradually and in context. Attention to particular words or grammatical structures does not drive the use of language in the classroom; subject content does.

Bilingual education is rapidly expanding in Australia at present. It's particularly important for parents and teachers of children studying in a bilingual education program to understand what bilingual education means. This gives us a sense of perspective on contemporary language education and helps us to have realistic expectations.

18 is bilingual education an educational risk?

Although bi- and multilingualism are more common than monolingualism around the globe, people accustomed to essentially monolingual education may be sceptical about bilingual education. Will it be twice as hard? Will literacy or educational standards be sacrificed in some way? Will my child somehow lose something through having to use two languages instead of one?

Learning through two languages has the power to increase what children can learn about language and about life. Bilingual education is designed to augment the learning experience both culturally and cognitively. However, not just any old language program will do this. Every learning situation is different. Bilingual education needs to be sensitively planned. There are some important basic principles to be taken into account.

The first basic principle might be called: 1 + 1 = 2: both the first and the second language need to be academically supported. An effective bilingual program adds a second language to the child's existing repertoire. To effect this, both languages – the first and the second – need their own unadulterated space. In this way, the child can continue building on the base knowledge of the first language while developing the scaffolding for the second. Fortunately, once we know one language, we can lean on it a bit to help with figuring out the second language. And although I try to steer clear of characterising language teachers as grammar police, a little grammar teaching is a good thing. Language learners do benefit from knowing about language structure and good teachers know how to work supportive structural information (a.k.a. grammar) into a lesson.

The second basic is that children need to have enough of the second language to be able to learn through it before they are expected to do just that. This is one of the reasons why it is important to keep up the first language at the same time – so kids can keep on learning about and through language. Once they have picked up the basics of the second language, they can start to do things with it. But they need to have a basic working grip on the tool of language in order to use it.

The third basic is that both languages have to be purposefully used. Immersion education is designed in such a way that the second language is used for the study of subjects in the curriculum. If the language is only studied as a kind of objet d'art, then you might never need to actually communicate through it. How many of us have studied a year or two of a foreign language and yet find ourselves embarrassingly unable to actually do anything with it? It is important to understand how language works, just as it is important to understand how the body works, and how engines work, how the economy works and so on. It is important to be able to use language effectively and appropriately.

The fourth basic is that both languages must be valued. Kids are smart – they sort out very quickly which languages are important and which are not and gear their learning accordingly. For effective bilingual education to occur, both languages need to have their importance and their space established. The LOTE is not compromised; a subject taught in German is taught only in German and not mixed with or explained in English. In this way, the child is highly motivated to learn the LOTE.

These same principles need to be honoured whether the aim of the bilingual education program is language enrichment (most LOTE programs here) or compensation (ESL in the same context). Immersion programs of different shapes and sizes have been very successful in varying social contexts where these basics have been adhered to. We can look forward to having children who are more aware of language use in general, more capable in a particular LOTE, more understanding of people from different cultural backgrounds, and, as if this weren't already enough, performing as well if not better than monolingual children on tests of school achievement. Not bad, eh?

19 is there a "best" bilingual program?

Is the same bilingual program equally suitable for all children?

This is an important question. At a conference I attended in Queensland, a woman complained to me that existing Australian bilingual programs were inadequate for her children who were already bilingual. Her argument was that since her children spoke the language through which half of the school content was taught (French, in her case) at home, they would need more demanding French literacy at school. She was adamant: there was simply not enough literate use of French in existing bilingual curricula for her children.

She was right. The same bilingual program cannot be everything to everybody. The level of language used in a partial French immersion program in Australia is geared to English-speaking Australian children who are learning French in an enrichment program. What this woman envisaged for her children was a curriculum oriented towards the maintenance and development of her children's home language. This is different. There are different types of bilingual education which reflect different purposes for learning – or maintaining a first or second language.

Australia's increasingly multicultural character means that not all children in a bilingual program will be native English speakers. This is not necessarily a problem. However, it is true that children have different needs. If children can speak the LOTE taught in a bilingual program before attending school, they can progress much faster, or conversely be seen, as this woman chose to do, as held back by the slower pace of their classmates. However, I would suggest that these children could quite comfortably sit in the same classes. I would also recommend that they expand on their French literacy at home with the resources expected of a minority language home: story books, games and videos in the home language. (Refer to Beligan, Clyne & Lotherington, 1999, for discussion of language resources in community languages.) Such children are assets in a bilingual class, supporting and helping their classmates by providing good models of the language in use.

What if these children don't speak English before coming to school? What if

they only speak the home language? Can they attend the same classes?

Yes, why not? Where most children speak English and are learning French, or Italian or Hebrew, etc., these children speak the LOTE and are learning English. They will require ESL assistance. However, in a partial immersion program where each language is used for a dedicated portion of the time, these children will be better off than those of the same language backgrounds who attend mainstream English schools. They will function normally in the LOTE subjects, given their greater competence in the language and, with ESL help, learn English through immersion. There is also the decided advantage of English being spoken as the language of wider communication in the playground.

Now what if children speak Greek or Somali or Vietnamese, etc. at home? Can they attend a bilingual program in, say, English and German?

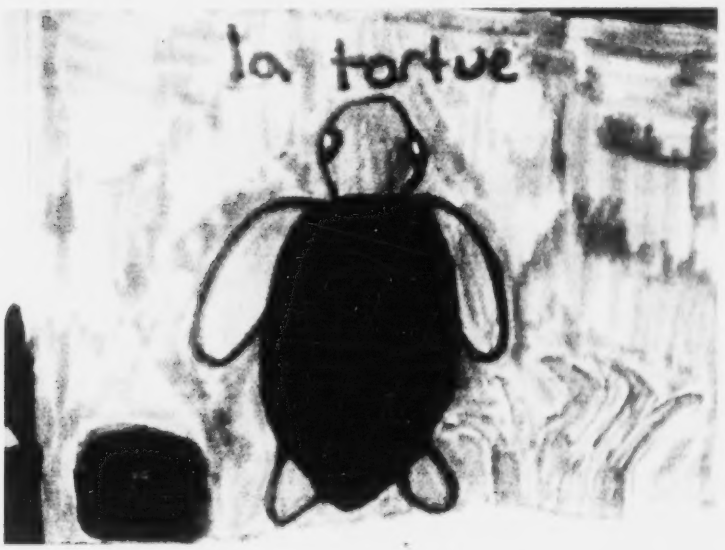
This is a different situation. Many children enter bilingual programs from a third language background – and become trilingual if support is given to all languages. However, in all fairness, minority language children need to have good working control of at least one language used in the bilingual program. Many children in Australia will have acquired a sufficient working knowledge of English to enter a bilingual primary school program simply through preschool play, although oral second language competence should not be mistaken for readiness for literacy in the second language. However, individual assessments would be advised for students whose language proficiencies in both of the languages of the bilingual program are in doubt.

So is bilingual education suitable for all children?

All children in Australia are expected to study a second language. Schools provide opportunities to learn second languages in different ways, including LOTE classes which may be taught by a specialised teacher or delivered via satellite classes; and immersion programs where, as we've seen, part of the curriculum is taught through the medium of the LOTE. It is important to keep in mind that children are individuals and will have different talents, preferences and aptitudes. Some children may manifest learning disabilities, such as, for example, perceptual problems in learning how to read, that require remedial attention and parents may be more comfortable not putting such a child in an immersion program. I would hasten to add that bilingual education does not complicate or promote any learning problems or speech

disorders and children with modest IQs or speech problems, such as stuttering, will do fine in an immersion classroom. As earlier mentioned, children who do not speak either of the languages offered in an immersion program should not be enrolled in such a program but neither should new arrivals to Australia be enrolled in mainstream English schools without specialised ESL instruction. Children may also show particular gifts and talents in particular areas, such as art or sport, which a parent chooses to refocus the child on. However, the evidence we have is that children thrive in soundly planned and supported bilingual education and they carry with them a more profound awareness of language as well as the basis for learning subsequent languages with greater facility.

What is essential is that the bilingual program be well planned and taught.



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20 what is a good bilingual program?

Schools do not exist in a vacuum; they are part of a community. What children learn at school is shaped by many factors, including what the society thinks is important. The language/s used and the kind of language instruction children get at school are broadly determined by government policy. Australia has a language policy that strongly supports multiculturalism. Australia's language policy, which is much admired internationally, encourages bi- and multilingualism, and provides the impetus for states to build into their curricula opportunities for all children to learn one or more second languages at school as a fundamental part of their education. Bravo!

Australia sees multilingualism as a strength both socially and economically. Those who have come to Australia from non-English-speaking countries need to learn to speak English in order to survive but are encouraged to keep their own languages, too. This helps them to maintain a sense of self, keep up ties with those outside the country (whether for business, social relationships or cultural interests), and learn other languages, including English. Native English speakers are equally encouraged to learn other languages, which advantages them in many obvious ways, such as understanding other cultures, broadening thinking power, and even beefing up skills marketability ... perhaps a little way down the track from primary school, of course.

That languages are taught in school is primarily a political decision. Which languages are to be taught is also shaped to some extent by government policy. Several languages are prioritised in each state and schools choose which language or languages they teach (which can also include non-priority languages) and how they are going to go about it. That's where the community comes into the picture. The proportion of the school day spent in what language depends to an extent on language and literacy resources in the school and community.

In some communities, the LOTE taught at school is a language used in the community. I have visited or worked with schools in Melbourne where German, Vietnamese and Chinese are taught in various content-based programs and echoed in the community. The access to community language

and literacy resources affords teachers the opportunity to include community experiences in school learning, which is always a very healthy educational experience. So children have the opportunity to use their language and perhaps also literacy skills in the LOTE on field trips to local institutions, such as senior citizens' and nursing homes. Also local texts, such as newspapers, posters and announcements, can be incorporated in class activities.

In other cases, the LOTE taught at school is not a language used in the wider community. In Melbourne, for example, Japanese and French would be examples of languages taught at school which are not commonly used in the community. In such cases, the school must be able to support the teaching of the LOTE through its own human and material resources. Children might find that their only opportunity to hear and use the LOTE is during school hours. Community connections notwithstanding, it is important to remember that schools are also part of the global electronic community, and access to particular language groups can also be organised through computer networks.

Bilingual education means that two languages are taught. We expect one of these languages to be known to students, and the other, to be new. The language that needs the most emphasis is the language least likely to be supported in the community, whether that community includes the school only, the school and surrounding suburb or the school as a part of a networked global community. Good bilingual education means that two languages are learned; both have to be supported.

This can get very complicated. There are children the world over who are put into classrooms where they are made to study in a high status language (such as English, French, Spanish, Russian or Chinese) at the expense of their less worldly home language. This is, generally speaking, disastrous. These children can end up trading one language for another without successfully mastering the new one, or sufficiently developing the home language which plays an important role in their cognitive and social development. Then there is the opposite: children who speak a high status language at home and in the society getting only a teensy little bit of the second language that can't be heard or seen anywhere other than at school. This doesn't do much good either.

A good bilingual program supports and nurtures two languages in the most efficient way possible, taking into consideration community and social support mechanisms for both languages. So very good bilingual programs can look quite different from each other, depending on where the linguistic resources are located.

21 what is immersion?

Bilingual education is a reasonably transparent term: education in two languages. But what exactly is immersion education? It sounds rather more like some sort of aquatic endeavour than language education.

The first immersion program began over thirty years ago in a suburb of Montréal, Québec, Canada. This was a bold experiment that parents in a mainly English-speaking suburb of a mainly French-speaking city instigated. These parents were frustrated that their children did not seem to be learning any more French than they had learned themselves as children in traditional language programs – you know the type – you learn your verbs and do a few translations but can't actually use the language for any real spoken communication. Many people have this sort of frustration but not all of us live in contexts where our economic and political survival will depend on learning the language of the majority. These parents conscripted a couple of well-known academics from McGill University to help them and approached their local school with the idea of having their children attend kindergarten taught in French by teachers of native speaker competence. The school reluctantly agreed, making it very clear that this was a concession to parental pressure rather than a sound academic move. Enrolment in the experimental kindergarten opened at 1 pm on a fateful day in 1965. By 1:05 pm the first immersion kindergarten was fully-booked. This fledgling program was to lead the world in innovative language education.

Parents of the children attending French immersion kindergarten in St. Lambert, Québec were very smart. They realised that learning French (for English speakers living in Québec) was important not just educationally but socially and psychologically as well. What they asked for was this: that their children learn how to speak French and learn about French-Canadian culture without compromising their English language and literacy or their English-Canadian culture. The experimental immersion program was a total immersion situation: the children were immersed in French all day. In other words, 100% of subject content was taught in French. In immersion programs in Victoria, where needs are very different from those of minority English speakers in

Québec, partial immersion programs, where up to half of the school curriculum is taught through the medium of the LOTE, are preferred. Even in total immersion programs in Canada, children begin to get some English as they proceed in school. This exposure to English increases as children climb the school ladder.

Some rules of thumb have emerged from several decades of immersion education. The language of immersion – the second language – needs a well-defined space and users. In Canada, it is expected that the French teachers speak nothing but French – including when children need scraped knees attended to and when skirmishes on the playground require teacher intervention. The French classrooms are equally sacrosanct. French is used there. English is used in the English classrooms. These separations are maintained. Once children know that a teacher can actually communicate in their home language as well – English in this case (we'll leave out complications of multiculturalism which apply to Canada, too) then the language learning environment is compromised. Kids know that the teacher will eventually buckle and use the language they already know so they don't have to expend the energy to learn this new one. Kids are smart that way – this is very efficient use of knowledge and resources. We need to ensure that we can't be so easily outsmarted! The operating principle behind immersion education is that language has to be used consistently and for real communicative purposes.

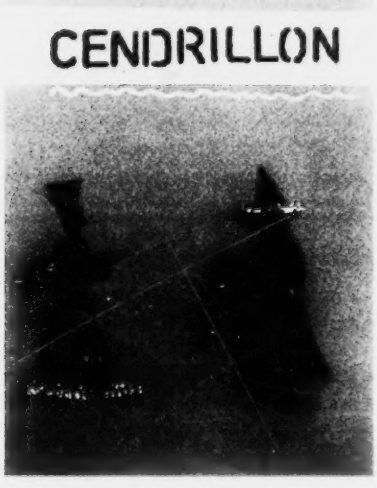
It takes children a while to be able to produce enough language to ask questions in the language they are immersed in at school. We can always understand more language than we can produce. This is a constant – I can read a great novel but unfortunately I haven't produced one yet. Toddlers can understand lots of instructions – but they can't give them. If you know a reasonable amount of Italian you can make your way through an Italian movie – but could you actually act in it? It is the same principle for children in immersion classes. It takes quite a while before they can actually produce the second language – but they can follow what is going on. That is why teachers in immersion education can listen to children's requests, questions and ideas in English but need to continue vigilantly to function only in the target language. Children expected to learn through the medium of the target language and exposed solidly to it, will. It works.

Studies have shown that children succeed in immersion education in a variety

of social and cultural contexts (although social support for an immersion program is a very important consideration). Total immersion programs have been successfully instituted in Canada and Wales, where the second language is an official minority language. In an American state, a neat double immersion program has been successfully instituted with English-speaking American children and Hispanic children joining up in a bilingual program given 50% in English and 50% in Spanish. In Europe, where many exciting language programs are offered, Swedish children are learning German through immersion. Immersion education is functioning very well in many countries around the globe now.

It is important to understand that immersion programs support two languages. All over the world, children are put into formal education in a language that they do not know and are expected to learn as they go along, without either sufficient help in the second language or sufficient support for the first language. This is not immersion but ***submersion***: throwing a child into the deep end and hoping for the best. In immersion, as in all good bilingual education programs, both languages are supported. This is critical.

The degree of proficiency children have in the second language will be good after immersion education but it will not be perfect. Nonetheless, immersion education is much better than learning how to conjugate verbs, n'est ce pas? I hope the parents of the first St. Lambert immersion kindergarten are now duly proud. They would have been considered rather difficult parents by their community school in their day. But they were right. Immersion education is now an international trend.



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22 literacy

Language is a special tool that allows human beings to encode and decode meaning. We can communicate using language via several media: our speech organs, our eyes and hands (in signed languages) and by means of writing. Writing is actually a rather whizz-bang, newfangled human development. It is thought that our ancestors began to develop speech some 50,000 to 100,000 years ago. However, reading and writing, the basis of what we call literacy, are much more recent innovations, going back only a few thousand years. Very early preserved inscriptions date back to around 11,000-12,000 BC. And whereas language is innate – all normal human beings develop language during the first 5 or 6 years of life, following similar stages of development, literacy is learned.

Literacy has only become a mass phenomenon over the past century or two. Reading and writing, now considered an essential social and cognitive ability, were the elite province of clerics and scribes only a thousand years ago. As the 21st century dawns, perceived problems with literacy levels in the population draw major headlines in the mass media, where those accused of having inadequate literacy skills are described in terms of handicap.

Literacy is a communication technology that allows us to use language more flexibly. However, literacy is distinguishable from language. Literacy exists outside language in that we use literate conventions to record and produce music. We also use literate conventions to communicate with machines (computer programming using "computer languages") with which we cannot speak (yet?). Literacy is mutating as we reach the 21st century incorporating visual texts (such as films and television shows) and electronic technologies (such as computers and "game boys"), so that the old "reading and writing" turf that used to describe essential literacy skills is no longer quite enough. Life on earth has developed to the point where literacy is considered to be an essential human capability, and language learning – indeed, any kind of learning – is now unthinkable without the attainment of fluent and appropriate literacy skills.

Some scholars consider literacy – the ability to translate language into a shared written code that allows us to carry messages over time and distance – to be the highest achievement of our species. In the old days, that's what school was for: to teach children to read and write and do their sums. Indeed literacy acquisition is still one of the big milestones of primary school education, without which further formal education is not possible. That's why we need to think about literacy here. Learning a second language at school means developing a more sophisticated set of literacy skills. This, of course, can only be good.

People who can read and write in two languages are biliterate. Indeed the world of literacy has become so complicated that we talk of the need for multiple literacies before we even get near other languages. However, just as languages describe and conceptualise the world a little differently from each other, so too do their literate interfaces vary.

Everyone reading this can use the Roman alphabet (you didn't think this was the English alphabet, did you?). This is a system of letters each of which indicates a single sound (well, theoretically). English does this very inefficiently, using left-over letters, such as ***x*** and ***q*** and ***c*** to show sounds that could be perfectly well encoded using more useful letters, such as ***k*** and ***s***. Also it is abysmally inconsistent, indicating plenty of different sounds with the same letter (such as ***a*** in ***class, case, cause, car, crease,*** etc.) which is why spelling is sometimes a problem. Not all languages use alphabets and there are several different alphabets in use. Some languages indicate syllables rather than individual sounds. We call those systems ***syllabaries***. Korean and Japanese use syllabaries. And Chinese languages encode whole words in logograms. The point is that children who are learning another language are also learning another literacy.

What does that mean?

23 writing conventions

Writing is a marvellous technological invention. It lets us communicate over time and distance using symbols instead of voices. Languages use different ways of symbolising speech.

The alphabet will be familiar to you, of course. Why do we go to school? To learn our 'abc's...

The purpose of an alphabet is to use a symbol: a letter, to represent a sound. Such a system can take a small number of symbols – we use 26 letters of the Roman alphabet to write English – and combine these symbols to encode different words. Sounds like a perfectly logical, high efficiency system for putting words on paper, doesn't it?

There are, however, a few snags, including the closeness of the actual sound-symbol match. This is at the heart of spelling problems which include remembering the 'correct' spelling; choosing the culturally most acceptable spelling where alternatives exist (e.g. spelled or spelt? organise or organize?); and of course trying to spell a new word you haven't written before.

English gets a clear 'fail' in matching sounds to letters. Do you recognise George Bernard Shaw's spelling of ***fish*** as ***ghoti? gh*** as in ***enough***, ***o*** as in ***women***, and ***ti*** as in ***nation***. I rest my case.

Perhaps you're like me in needing to write ***weird*** down in order to tell if the ***ei*** is in the right order. And why is there an ***i*** in there anyway? Shudn't wee jest rite ***weerd?*** O deer.

Spanish is an example of a language which does a very good job of indicating how words actually sound through the spelling. What you see is effectively what you say.

We can console ourselves in knowing that back in the early days of the printing press, when words like ***knight*** and ***enough*** found their way into print, people spoke a little differently. Languages change over time and across geographical distance. None of us sound much like Shakespeare did, for example.

Shakespeare's name was spelled in many colourful ways, including ***Shackespere***, ***Shakspere***, ***Shake-speare*** and even ***Shagsper***. People weren't very consistent spellers back in those days. However, with the invention of the printing press and the beginning of mass produced texts (which had previously been laboriously written by hand) came increased standardisation in spelling. As words were typeset, expectations of what words should look like developed and consistency was needed in spelling patterns. So we expect ***Shakespeare*** to be written as such and not as ***Shagsper***.

At the same time, our spoken language continued to develop and change; it grew new words (relatively recent additions might be: ***modem, whinge*** or how about ***nutriceutical***) and lost older words (hands up all those people who say ***shan't, frock or motor car...***). Pronunciation also slowly changed. Now, ***light*** and ***lite*** sound the same (of course we all recognise that ***lite*** refers to food and drink which is kilojoule-reduced rather than to illumination) although back in the days before ***lite*** anything, light sounded rather different.

English might not do a very good job of consistently matching up the letter-to-sound relationship but it does preserve the meaning basis of a word. For example, ***nation*** is not written as ***naishun*** but we recognise ***nation*** in ***nationality***. However, ***nationality*** doesn't have the same vowel quality as nation and would have to be written in a better letter-to-sound correspondence as something like ***nashunaletee*** or ***nashunaledee***. So we would lose meaning recognition in order to have a better sound guide.

Also whereas you might say something like ***naishun***, I would probably say ***neishun***, so whose accent do you pick when you write down words intended to be accessible to an international audience?

Enough bashing of English spelling. The system works despite grate oportunities for speling misstakes. The point is to say that the same Roman alphabet is used a little differently to represent other languages. For example, some languages add interesting little marks above, below or through letters such as é, o, ñ, ü, ç, â, which specify particular pronunciation. Other languages also use combinations of letters that we don't use in English, such as aa, or cz. Still others have additional letters that we don't use at all, such as ß, or æ. Moreover, a sound such as 'sh' in English might be represented by a different combination of letters such as sz (Polish) or s (Hungarian) or ch (French).

The point is that reading and writing in a LOTE may be a little ... or a lot different from reading and writing in English.

There are many different alphabets in use. For example, Russian is written using the Cyrillic alphabet, and Hindi, using the Devanagari alphabet. There are alphabetic systems that encode just the consonant sounds and only indicate with a little mark where the vowel goes, such as Hebrew and Arabic. You read these languages from right to left, so there is a change in the directionality, too. There are also systems of writing that do not use alphabets at all, but encode combinations of sounds in a single symbol. Some Native American languages use a syllabic system. Japanese uses a syllabary to encode some words. However, Japanese is complicated as it uses a combination of writing systems to encode language and learners must learn to manipulate all component systems in order to read and write Japanese. One of these systems, ***kanji***, is based on the Chinese way of writing in which a symbol represents not a single sound or a syllable but a whole word through a complicated encoding of meaning together with clues about sound. Furthermore, in traditional Chinese, you would read these logograms not only from right to left but from top to bottom.

Learners of second languages are also learners of second literacies. Reading and writing in the language being learned may entail a lot of new learning, depending on the writing system the LOTE uses. Anyone who has learned to read and write in one language can use their knowledge in learning to read and write in another language. But whereas linguists believe that all languages are of equal complexity (the things that are hard about each language are a little different in every case), the same cannot be said of the conventions used in writing those languages. Some languages require more memory in terms of learning to read and write them than do others. Learning how to read and write in another language that uses the Roman alphabet, such as French or Italian or Vietnamese or Indonesian, requires less time than acquiring literacy skills in a language which uses a different alphabet, such as Russian, or one which uses a writing system that functions a little differently from a typical alphabet, e.g., Hebrew or Arabic, or a character-based writing system, such as Chinese.

This has consequences for bilingual education. Factoring in Chinese or Japanese literacy as an essential component of a content-based bilingual program will require more language and literacy preparation than will the same program in a related Indo-European language written in the Roman alphabet, such as German or Danish.

24 learning to read and write

It is common to open up the newspaper to the editorial page and find plenty of public commentary on literacy. Can our children read and write well enough to succeed in school? Can adults read and write well enough to function successfully in society? Does the government need to spend more money on literacy standards? Are newcomers to Australia learning to function in the literate ways of this country?

First of all, it's a good idea to unpack the notion of literacy, which is a complex term used all too often with insufficient care. If I were to ask: "What is literacy?", my guess is that you would reply: "being able to read and write.". This is indeed a critical part of what literacy is all about but it's not the whole story. I see letters to the editor complaining about poor literacy standards and pointing to grammar mistakes to shore up their claims. Or stressing that non-English speakers aren't literate because they don't know English. Grammar, however, isn't limited to writing, and it's not very indicative of literate abilities either. Also many non-English speaking background (NESB) Australians are very literate, but maybe not in English – yet. People tend to make literacy into a grab bag of the language skills society considers to be important – that is, reading and writing documentary material in English.

Literacy is much bigger than this. I think of literacy as a processing facility for producing, receiving and responding to communication that stretches across space and time, using appropriate technologies. We have moved from the era of pencil and paper messages into the era of computers in which literacy requires using word processors, internet search engines, telephone banking services, etc. Literacy requires being able to manage to send and retrieve texts through all sorts of electronic channels these days. And this can be done in several languages (including computer languages that allow human-machine "talk").

Now how did we get to the stage where we can do all of this?

Literacy development, unlike language development, is learned. This is not to discount the bright child who learns to read spontaneously – or rather, learns

to read out of interest and a strong talent for figuring things out by themselves, given access to reading materials and maybe indulgent brothers, sisters or others who provide a bit of help. Most of us learn to read in school, however, with a great deal of cultural support preceding actual instruction. In fact, we socialise our children into reading and writing. This is to say that we prepare them to read and write in the same way we teach them about table manners, cleaning up after making messes (I haven't been too successful here...), sharing toys, being honest and so forth. This is why literacy is a bit different from culture to culture. Whereas we would read a bedtime story to our children, this would not be a typical activity in Japan – where they have traditions we don't, etc...

Children brought up in Anglo-Australian households, especially those in middle class areas of large cities, would typically grow up with literacy practices in action around them. Their houses contain bookshelves. They see parents or siblings who read newspapers, magazines and books of various descriptions; they watch household members consulting helpful guides such as telephone directories, cook books, manuals for constructing, repairing or maintaining items, e.g., car manuals or Ikea furniture instructions; they see people using pens or computers, including pocket sized computer games. Children are immersed in a world of print which they soon start to create. Remember all those beautiful frescos your 2 year old created on your walls and furniture when let loose with a pencil? Show me a parent who doesn't have a book or two that their preschool child didn't think he or she should revise with early scribbles. We have all given similar lessons – "You need to treat books with respect!" "Don't write in books with stories in them!" "Don't write on the walls!" This is hard for a child to sort out, of course, when everyone else in the household seems to be allowed to write on things.

Children learn very early on to recognise signs which include print. All preschoolers know exactly where to locate their favourite junkfood on the supermarket shelves. The colours of the packets help in deciphering one brand from another, but children manage to find exactly what they want. This requires the same sort of skill that reading a book does, except books exclude contextual indicators such as their specific place on the checkout counter or envelope or shop sign, or being written on a packet of pink foil.

Parents know, too, to read to their children and most children in middle class Anglo-Australian homes have bookshelves with picture books, games with

cards or boards, and computer games on screens varying from home computers to palm-held gameboys. Children frequently attend organised preschool care where they are encouraged to label and recognise their belongings. Television programs such as Sesame Street teach children the letters of the alphabet and basic numerals when they are at home. Children who grow up in homes where such resources are available and used have a great head start when they walk into their first day of school and into the beginnings of formal basic literacy and numeracy instruction. In fact, our schools depend on this sort of early childhood socialisation, and children from backgrounds that have different cultural literacy activities often find themselves at a disadvantage for not starting school in the same place.

And now our children are using what they know about literacy to learn another literacy. As long as both are supported, they get two for the price of one. You can't beat that.

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25 language, ecology and education

Language is a powerful tool for human communication. There are approximately 5,000 – 7,000 languages used in the world today (depending on calculations of where a dialect stops being a dialect and starts being a separate language). Some languages have more speakers than others. This may make these languages more socially or economically prominent or more utilitarian to learn but it does not make them better languages. Many languages, especially aboriginal languages, are dying around the world. This is a great human loss.

We work very hard to preserve endangered species of plants and animals. Somehow we have forgotten ourselves in this process. We are not saving endangered languages and cultures. It is true that there are people who do not want to preserve their own heritage language. But with the loss of each and every language around the world, we lose a way of seeing and knowing what people have encoded into stories – whether written or oral – which explain the world to us a little differently. A Darwinian notion of strongest language winning out in social usage does not work well. Ways of communicating are not competitive – they are complementary. We have much to learn from each other.

People from small speech ***communities***, i.e., who speak languages that are spoken by a relatively small number of people, typically learn to communicate in one or more languages of wider communication, of which English would be a good example. This is important for economic survival. However, far too few of us who are native speakers of utilitarian world languages learn the languages of others. To know another language is to know another world. I find myself wanting to read great writers in Chinese, Russian, German, Spanish, Arabic, to talk to relatives in Polish, and friends in Fijian, Hindi and Finnish, to understand the voices of artists in Inuit and Koori communities, to understand songs in African languages and prayers in Hebrew and Latin. I want to watch films in Japanese, Turkish, Hungarian and Italian and hear the actors speak with their own voices.

We are slowly suffocating in a world of American-based English where global media are so overwhelmingly American in origins that we know more about Baywatch than we do about Bondi. Many Anglo-Australian words that have sent me to the dictionary – ***drongo, smoko, prang*** – are being squeezed by television influenced Americanisms. Many, many languages of small speech communities are being wiped out in the process of acquiring formal education in this global, electronic era that pushes English so strongly.

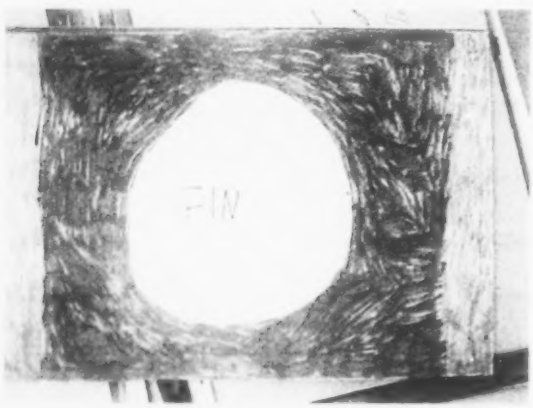
Australia has been a world leader in educational language policy – encouraging the acquisition and maintenance of languages other than English. Children here are very fortunate to have the opportunity to add another language to their repertoire through formal learning in an enlightened age. The choice of languages to learn in school is staggering, even though it is selective, given massive national language resources. Although many children are being steered into major world languages, I take heart in knowing that there are many others who are learning languages of small speech communities so they can talk to their grandmothers. Lots of children are doing both. Studies have shown that bilinguals have a head start on monolinguals in acquiring subsequent languages. Whatever the motivation for learning a second language – trade, access to important literature, keeping up with the family back home, or just learning about a new group of people and their ways of expressing themselves – the benefits of language learning will be great.

I hope that my next language will be an aboriginal language. I may never speak it well enough to use conversationally and no doubt no one will ever think of using it with me. But I want to know how it is that we have missed the connection with our own earth to the point that it is rotting in pollution. Scientists are going back to tribal societies in search of their ecological methods of growing and harvesting food, and their herbal medicines that continue to baffle the best and the brightest. These are stories I want to understand.

conclusion

We have talked about what language is, how language is our special human tool, reflecting and constructing our cultures, and, as such, how languages are related to each other. We traced two languages in a brief history: English and French. We discussed how we learn to speak our first language, how we learn subsequent languages, and whether age matters. We talked about needing to use language in socially appropriate ways as well as what vocabulary, grammar and accent are all about. We also thought about why some languages seem to be harder to learn than others, given that no language is intrinsically more or less complex. We discussed the educational importance of learning second languages, what bilingualism means, and what bilingual education and immersion education are all about. We talked about literacy and learning to use literate skills in our first and subsequent languages, given some of the differences in conventions and traditions. Lastly, we looked at language from an ecological perspective.

I hope you have enjoyed reading this book as much as I have enjoyed writing it. I hope that having learned more about language and languages, you will be better equipped to understand and support the second language learning your child is undertaking. Indeed I hope you will be encouraged to explore the wealth of languages surrounding us all a little more as well! ***Bonne chance! ¡Buena suerte! Powodzenia! Viel Glück! Het beste! Labas sekmes! Be'hatslacha! Ogenki de!***



glossary

accent the systematic way a person pronounces his or her language; accent reveals information on one's social and regional background; see also ***pronunciation***

accuracy grammatical correctness

affix a letter or syllable which when added to a word changes its meaning in a predictable way; common affixes in English include: prefixes, such as un-, dis-, re-, or suffixes, such as –ing, -ed, -s; see also ***prefix, suffix***

alphabet a writing system using letters, e.g., Roman alphabet; see also ***logography, syllabary***

artificial language a language which has been invented by someone, e.g., Esperanto

babbling a stage in early speech development occurring at around 6 months where babies make reduplicated consonant + vowel sounds, such as ba-ba-ba-ba

baby talk the manner in which adults, especially parents and child-minders, speak to young children who are learning to talk, using simplified forms and exaggerated intonation

bilingualism the state of being able to function in two languages; may describe an individual or a society

bilingual education a type of education in which two languages are used and supported in the teaching of the curriculum; various models of bilingual education exist; see also content-based bilingual education, immersion

biliteracy the state of being able to read and write in two languages; see also ***literacy***

cognitive development the development of thinking in an individual

communicative competence the ability to use language functionally and appropriately in society

community languages languages other than English and Aboriginal languages which are spoken at the community level in Australia

compensation second language learning in a context where the learner is thought to lack essential language proficiency, e.g., ESL in Australia, see also ***enrichment***

computer languages codes constructed by humans in order to program computers

content-based bilingual education a type of bilingual education in which a second language is taught indirectly through its use as the medium of instruction of curriculum subjects. Content-based language teaching normally refers to programs in which a small portion of the content is taught through the medium of the second language, e.g., one subject; see also ***immersion***

cooing a stage in early speech development occurring at around 2-3 months where babies make comforting vowel–like sounds

critical period a hypothesised period after which human language learning capacity changes due to brain lateralisation; usually estimated to be around puberty; relates to first language learning

culture the customary way of doing things of a group of people

dialect a variety of a language indicating social or regional affiliations

English as a second language (ESL) English learned as a second language, that is, after another language has been learned as mother tongue; ESL is taught in schools as well as in workplace and community contexts to newcomers to Australia and to background speakers of community languages

enrichment second language learning in a context where access to the second language is considered to be enriching rather than essential, e.g., learning Japanese in Australia; see also ***compensation***

first language (L1) the language through which one learns to speak as a baby, although used by some bi/multilinguals to identify their strongest language; see also ***mother tongue; native language***

fluency the ability to speak a language steadily, without obvious hesitancy or pausing to self-correct and search for words

foreign language a language which is associated with a foreign country

fossilisation a state of frozen development in learning a second language which can occur, characterised by the systematic use of grammatical inaccuracies in otherwise fluent speech; see also ***fluency***.

globalisation movement towards viewing the world as a single community

grammar structure of a language; way in which words must be arranged to make sense in a given language

immersion a type of bilingual education in which a second language is taught indirectly through its use as the medium of instruction of curriculum subjects. Immersion education is content-based language teaching, and normally refers to programs in which 50% or more of curriculum content is taught through the medium of the second language; see also content-based bilingual education

Indo-European languages languages belonging to the Indo-European family which includes the majority (but not all) of European languages as well as various languages from the Middle East and India

inflected languages languages which indicate grammatical information by means of affixing particles to words; see ***affix***

input language, usually spoken but also written, directed to a language learner which provides the basis for acquisition

kanji a type of Japanese writing based on Chinese characters; see also ***logogram***

language distance the "genetic" distance between two languages based on their evolution; related languages come from the same ancestor language. Languages may be closely related, e.g., one Germanic language to another: German – Dutch; distantly related, e.g., one Indo-European language of the Germanic family to another of the Slavic family: Danish – Russian; or not related at all: one Indo-European language of the

Germanic family to an Australian language of the Pama-Nyungan family: English to Walpiri

language object a type of second language teaching in which the second language is the focus of the study

language other than English (LOTE) an acronym, used in Australia to designate languages spoken in the country above and beyond English

linguistics the study of language; concerned primarily with the sounds, meanings, structures, development and uses of language

literacy the practices, behaviours and skills needed in order to communicate through reading and writing

logogram a character which represents a word; some languages use logograms in their writing systems, e.g., Chinese, Japanese. See also: ***kanji***

logography a character-based writing system in which the word is represented by a logogram; see also ***alphabet***, ***logogram***, ***syllabary***

metalinguistic awareness the learned ability to think about language

minority language a language spoken by a group of people of a minority culture within a country

monoculturalism the state of knowing and being of only one culture; see also ***multiculturalism***

monolingualism the state of being able to function in one language only; may describe an individual or a society

mother tongue the language through which one learns to speak as a baby; see also ***first language***, ***native language***

multiculturalism cultural pluralism; more commonly used to describe a society; see also ***monoculturalism***

multilingualism the state of being able to function in three or more languages; may describe an individual or a society

native language the language through which one learns to speak as a baby, although sometimes used to designate the language of a person's cultural heritage; see also ***first language***, ***mother tongue***

native speaker one speaking his or her native language

nature innate quality; genetically endowed support for learning; see also ***nurture***

non-native speaker one speaking a language other than his or her native language; see also ***native speaker***

non-English speaking background (NESB) description of a person for whom English is not a native language; often used to designate people who have lived in Australia for some time but who are native speakers of a community language; see also ***community language***

norm designated standard; considered normal

nurture social encouragement; support for learning supplied through social interaction; see also ***nature***

one parent one language families families in which each parent consistently communicates with their children using a different language, typically their native language

partial immersion an immersion program in which approximately 50% of curriculum content is taught through the medium of the second language; see also ***immersion, total immersion***

pluricentric language a language which is used as a national language in different countries, e.g., English

prefix an affix added to the beginning of a word, such as ***un-, dis-, re-,*** in English; see also ***affix, suffix***

pronunciation the way in which we pronounce words; see also ***accent***

prescriptive grammar a tradition of upholding rules for correct grammatical usage, primarily based on speech or writing from earlier historical periods

second language (L2) any language learned subsequent to the first language; see also ***first language, mother tongue; native language***

speech community the group of people who speak your language

submersion an educational practice whereby students are forced to learn through the medium of a second language without adequate support for learning that language or for maintaining their first language; NOT a form of bilingual education; see also ***immersion***

suffix an affix added to the end of a word, e.g., –ing, -ed, -s in English; see also ***affix, prefix***

syllabary a writing system in which the smallest unit of sound represented is a consonant-vowel combination; see also ***alphabet, logography***

total immersion an immersion program in which 100% of curriculum content is taught through the medium of the second language in the early stages of the program with increasing amounts of first language instruction being added in subsequent years; see also ***immersion, partial immersion***

vocabulary a set of words in a language

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What's bilingual education all about?

A guide to language learning in today's schools

by **Dr Heather Lotherington**
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This extremely useful and interesting publication is intended for parents, teachers and anyone in the wider community who has an interest in language, language acquisition, second language learning, bilingual and multilingual education, bilingualism, language culture and society, language and power, and literacy among other fascinating topics.

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